Parent involvement in a post Proposition 2-1/2 era: the effects of politics and education funding on parent involvement in an urban setting: a case study.

Lora McNeece Barrett

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN A POST PROPOSITION 2 1/2 ERA: THE EFFECTS OF POLITICS AND EDUCATION FUNDING ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN AN URBAN SETTING

A CASE STUDY

A Dissertation Presented

by

LORA MCNEECE BARRETT

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 1993

School of Education
PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN A POST PROPOSITION 2 1/2 ERA: THE EFFECTS OF POLITICS AND EDUCATION FUNDING ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN AN URBAN SETTING

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DEDICATION

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat.

_Theodore Roosevelt_

To the parents who allowed me to share their voices and their thoughts, this dissertation is dedicated to you, for you are no timid souls. Thank you Beth, Kay, Eduardo, Kate, Daniel and María, for your courage, your wisdom, your enthusiasm, and for all you have done for the children.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It seems almost impossible that I have reached a point in my ongoing academic experience that allows me the opportunity to write this page. How distant it once seemed, how unattainable. It will seem strange, almost, to have this all behind me, to be able to go on, so to speak, with my life and find new beginnings and challenges. My days of writing drafts, giving them to Sonia, rewriting, rethinking, wondering what I should add or leave out are over; no more second thoughts. What I have before me is what I suspect will be my lifelong interest ... the issues of politics and their impact on the public schools of this country. I have certainly not reached this place by myself. No one could have.

I know that this is a very important page. In many ways, it is more important to the people who will trouble to read it because it is so personal. The dissertation itself reveals facts and recommendations. The acknowledgment page reveals my heartfelt thanks. To be mentioned on this page is indeed an honor.

For all of my friends and colleagues who have taken an interest in this process and in this subject, I thank you. I am extremely grateful to Beth, Kay, Daniel, Eduardo, María and Kate who allowed me to share their voices in this work. Without their honesty, insight, commitment and trust this study would not have been possible. They are to be admired for their tenacity and integrity. C. David Scanlin, a parent who has given countless hours in support of the rights of
parents and children, deserves thanks. His review of my interpretation of the data as well as his enthusiasm and interest in the process has helped support my work.

To my friends George Counter and Timothy Barrett, thank you for being forward thinking and for believing in and trusting in the power of parents. To Robert O’Neill, my former colleague and supervisor, I owe a debt of gratitude for encouraging the process of parent involvement and for believing in my ability to get a job done. All three allowed me to grow professionally and personally.

To my friends in Holyoke, but especially Judy Fletcher and Susan Barrett, I am very grateful. They supported me every step of the way, and were genuinely interested in the process, thus making this task seem less isolating. Susan’s expertise in written English has been invaluable. Judy’s feedback on the process of completing a dissertation has helped me stay on track. I’m looking forward to being able to help them through the same ordeal. And to Gerry Moriarty, who graciously gave me her home on Martha’s Vineyard to retreat to for writing, I shall never forget your generosity and friendship.

Friends from the Massachusetts Teachers Association have been important to my academic and personal development. To Jackie Coogan, a very special thanks. She, above all others, took interest in this journey and helped me reflect upon the differences in public education since the passage of Proposition 2 1/2.

This dissertation would not have been completed without the guidance, patience, encouragement and friendship of my dissertation
committee: Sonia Nieto, Arlyn Diamond, and Luis Fuentes. Muchas gracias, my friends. Thank you for believing in me and helping me to attain this honor. I am especially indebted to the Chairperson, Sonia Nieto, who spent hour after hour reading draft after draft. Her gentle yet strong manner is one I admire, and I hold her in the highest esteem. The faculty at the University of Massachusetts, and this committee in particular, is second to none. May the Commonwealth treasure their wisdom, dedication, and expertise.

I am also grateful to my family, who understood the demands that vast amounts of time in the library, at home in the den, and in front of the computer kept me apart from them. My parents, Vincent and Beatrice McNeece always encouraged me to be a teacher and to work hard. They taught me to set lofty goals and then to achieve them. Their expectations have helped me to reach today. The camaraderie, love, and scrappiness of growing up with Noreen, Dina and Vinny, my siblings, helped form my strong personality. The joy of participating in the growth of my nieces and nephews, Kate, Daniel, Beth, John, Mary and Michael has helped me become a more gentle, understanding, and patient teacher.

Finally, last but not least, I want to thank my husband Tom. Of all the people I’ve mentioned, he most deserves to share this special moment with me. Without his support and understanding I would never have been able to complete this process. He set up computer programs, transcribed the interviews, and offered the utmost in
patience, love and understanding. He allowed me the space to complete this work, and supported me in every way he could, never complaining. He is, and always has been, the “wind beneath my wings.”

In Spanish there is a phrase which literally translated means “we’re going to put the doors through the windows.” I feel that I have accomplished that, and now we can get on with planning a huge celebration, one so big that, as my Spanish-speaking friends would say, “vamos a tirar las puertas por las ventanas.”
ABSTRACT

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN A POST PROPOSITION 2 1/2 ERA: THE EFFECTS OF POLITICS AND EDUCATION FUNDING ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN AN URBAN SETTING

A CASE STUDY

MAY 1993

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Directed by: Professor Sonia Nieto

Parent involvement in political activities is a rare form of parent participation. Most parents who take an interest in schools become involved with their child’s classroom, attend school functions and activities, assist with fundraisers, attend PTA meetings. As the process for funding public school education has become more difficult and as decisions about education become more political, some parents have reacted to that trend and have become involved in the politics themselves.

Changes in laws and education funding formulas in Massachusetts over the last decade have caused parents to become
more protective, more vigilant of the school budget process, and of the way politicians position themselves on school issues.

This is the case study of six parents who have been involved in schools and community politics over a decade in Millville, a community in western Massachusetts. The population of Millville is mainly elderly and White, while the school population is more than seventy percent minority, the majority of whom are Puerto Ricans. This has caused a clash of culture, age, and priorities. The schools have become a political battleground, with parents no strangers to those battles, as they fight to protect the rights of children to an equitable education.

The involvement of these parents has been directly influenced by the enactment of a tax limitation proposal known as Proposition 2 1/2. A document review reveals the nature of the political climate of the Commonwealth during the last decade as it influenced local and state decision making about public schools and the funding of them.

This study explores for what reasons parents participate in parent involvement through governance activities; how the climate of the last decade has influenced the types of activities in which parents engage; why parents make governance activities their priority; how their earlier experiences in parent involvement were similar to or different from the types of activities they find themselves engaged in now; how their earlier impressions of their involvement differs from the current climate for parental involvement; and what types of parent involvement, given the current political climate of the Commonwealth, are most important now.
# Table of Contents

## Acknowledgments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Abstract

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### I. Introduction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting of the Study</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### II. Literature Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Involvement Literature</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Political Literature</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### III. Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the Approach</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Qualitative Research</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection and Management of Data</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Data</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS .................. 214

Introduction ................................................. 214

Implications ............................................... 215
Recommendations Based on the Study ..................... 218
Suggestions for Future Research ......................... 220
Conclusion ................................................... 222

APPENDICES

A. WRITTEN CONSENT FORM ............................... 224
B. PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE MILLVILLE
   PUBLIC SCHOOLS (English) .................................. 225
C. PARTICIPACION DE PADRES (Spanish) ................. 236

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................. 249
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The focus on involving parents and members of the community in schools and school reform has taken a new road in the past ten years, away from the phenomena of bake sales and bazaars. The focus is now on governance activities, instruction for parents in parenting skills, and general ways for parents to work more closely with their children.

Current research indicates that parent involvement of almost any kind improves student achievement (Henderson, 1981; Benson, 1980; Gordon, 1978; Rankin, 1967). Coleman (1987) found that schools of like socioeconomic backgrounds with an active PTA averaged higher in student achievement than those with an inactive or no PTA. Schools where parents are involved in a positive, meaningful manner, where they are respected and have an ownership in the school, will show achievement results higher than schools of similar type.

The research on parent involvement is broad and focuses primarily on the achievement of students through the impact of parent involvement. There are many forms of parent involvement, all of which overlap, and all types coexist. The research does not generally focus on the impact of politics on the nature and type of involvement in which parents participate. However, there are cases where parents and other citizens, those who are referred to as ‘‘fundamentalists,’’ lobby to have books removed from library shelves or have curricula changed based on religious reasons. It is not the
focus of this study to analyze the religious or moral reasons for parent involvement in those types of cases. The focus of this study will be to study the “watchdog” type of activity, where parents act as advocates for children (Henderson 1981), and where their activities then become explicitly political. The study will explore parental involvement in an urban school district as it adds to the school operation and philosophy rather than studying those cases where parents seek to remove or subtract any element of the school, whether curricular or financial. The parent as political advocate in Massachusetts has not been closely monitored or followed. Closer inspection of the role of parents in the political process, particularly in states where tax limiting initiatives are in place or will be adopted, will contribute to an understanding of the motives behind advocacy parent involvement (Henderson, 1981).

Statement of the Problem

Changes in laws and education funding formulas in Massachusetts over the last decade have created a need for parents to become more protective, more vigilant of the school budget process, and of the way politicians position themselves on any number of school issues. Parents have had to become more aggressive in their pursuit of a limited amount of tax dollars to fund school budgets. They have needed to become more involved in lobbying efforts not only for dwindling tax dollars, but for the maintenance or creation of programs to suit their children’s needs.
Changes in the political structure and funding of schools in Massachusetts over the last decade, largely impacted by the November 4, 1980 passage of Proposition 2 1/2, a tax restricting initiative petition on the state ballot, have had an impact on parent involvement. The loss of fiscal autonomy for school committees has changed the way parents participate in school governance. The issue of funding schools at the local and state level has influenced the manner in which parents perceive themselves as partners in their children’s education. Parents have taken on roles in schools in which heretofore they would not otherwise have engaged.

In the late 1970’s, a group called Citizens for Limited Taxation (CLT), dissatisfied with rising local property taxes, gathered enough signatures to have an initiative petition placed on the 1980 ballot. This petition limited the amount of money a community could raise through its property tax levy to 2.5 times the amount of the assessed valuation, called “fair and full cash value,” of all the property of the community in the previous year (Braude, 1988; Ladd & Wilson, 1981). While limiting the property tax, the most regressive form of taxation (where poorer families pay nearly three times more of their income to property taxes than do high income households (Braude, 1988; Frank, 1981)), the petition did not address how the municipal shortfall caused by the cap on property tax would be addressed. The electorate seized upon this tax limiting portion of the petition, and approved it at the polls. Other less noted sections of the petition included the repeal of the fiscal autonomy of school committees and the establishment of the mayor as chair of the local school committee, two mechanisms which would forever change the face of school
management in the Commonwealth. In addition, a provision mandated that no new programs would be imposed on cities and towns without state funding. No longer could school committees in Massachusetts establish a school department budget and submit it to the appropriating community body for funding. The mayor, henceforth, was able to dictate to the school committee what their total dollar amount was and they had to design a school budget based on that figure and not on programmatic and educational needs.

The early years of Proposition 2 1/2, failed to bring about the dire results that opponents of the petition had predicted. Municipal tax collections were reduced, but funding from the state filled in the gaps. Massachusetts was experiencing a period of growth and expansion. The state coffers contained money which, through heavy lobbying on the part of local officials, labor unions, parents, and others, was redirected back to cities and towns in the form of local aid which softened the blow of 2 1/2, and which allowed communities to continue local services. In fact, the state was in such good financial shape that a review of articles on education in the 1987 Boston Globe reveals not one article about teacher layoffs, school closings, or difficult contract negotiations with school districts. By 1987, the local aid section in the state budget had more than doubled (Braude, 1988). In 1985, an education reform package had been passed and a secure stream of dedicated revenue for the operation of local schools seemed to be assured (Cohen, 1985). Governor Michael Dukakis ran for the Presidency of the United States touting the “Massachusetts Miracle.”

In 1986, the Citizens for Limited Taxation had secured passage of yet another initiative petition, this time limiting the amount of
money that the state could raise in taxes. While the state continued to experience growth and expansion, the effects of the proposition were minimal. In 1990, the growth and expansion failed to stay ahead of inflation and spending and the state “hit the wall.” School enrollments were no longer declining, maintenance needs (repairing leaking roofs, painting buildings, replacing furniture) were increasing, and the cost of insurance for employees was spiraling. School districts, whether local or regional, as well as other municipal departments once again found themselves in a state of budget slashing. Concurrently, the governor and legislature were arguing over another school reform bill, with lack of funding a major impediment (Cohen, 1992).

Urban communities were particularly hard hit, and continue to be (Frank, 1981). They do not have a stable tax base and depend heavily upon the state and federal governments to provide financial assistance. Municipal budgets became a battleground where politicians could make a name. Parents of public school children, a minority in this country (Gallup, 1990), became more involved in defending their children’s right to a free, equal, quality public education. Parents engaged in lobbying at the state and local level for financial support for academic and extracurricular programs and for such essentials such as properly maintained buildings, educational supplies, and lower pupil-teacher ratios; parents engaged in fundraisers for sports and in lobbying efforts to have sports programs restored. Parents marched, organized, and spoke to members of the state and local political bodies and to the press. Their activities were expressly political.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine how local and state politics have influenced the way in which parents in one urban school system in western Massachusetts have made decisions about their participation with local schools. The study seeks to analyze the involvement of six parents in the Millville Public Schools who have participated in governance activities for more than a decade. They were specifically selected because of their broad array of activities, including those which were expressly political, and because they have been among the most vocal and aggressive parents.

The study was conducted by interviewing these parents and by tape recording their responses, which were later transcribed.

The study explored trends in parent involvement through the described activities of the six participants. All have been involved with the schools in numerous ways in the categories designated by Henderson (1986) as partners, collaborators and problem solvers, audience, supporters, advocates, and advisors and/or co-decision makers. The study focuses on their activities as political advocates, because this type of parent involvement has the greatest influence on the climate of education in a district. This study focuses on advocacy activities of a political nature which have impacted policies, programs, and funding for significant numbers of children in the district, and not just for the children of these particular parents.

This study explores the following questions:

- For what reasons do parents participate in parent
involvement through governance activities?

- How has the political climate of the last decade influenced the types of activities in which parents engage?
- Why do parents make governance activities their priority?
- How were their earlier experiences in parent involvement similar to or different from the types of activities they find themselves engaged in now?
- How did their earlier impressions of their involvement differ from the current climate for parent involvement?
- What types of parent involvement, given the current political climate of the Commonwealth, are most important now?

**Research Design**

The research for this study was conducted through qualitative interviews of six parents in an urban western Massachusetts community during the summer of 1992 and by a review of documents related to Proposition 2 1/2. By juxtaposing the qualitative research with the parent involvement literature and data from the political arena, the study will assess the impact of state and local politics on their involvement; the effect of a decade of school budget reduction on their participation; the kinds of issues that arose as the parents
became more involved; and the impact their involvement has had on the political process.

Parents have become more involved politically over the last decade. Although no generalizations can be made from the findings, the lessons we can learn from the parents in this study include how parental involvement can impact on the lives of those who become active; what benefits can be reaped from parental involvement; how politics influences the decisions parents make; and what motivates parents to become politically involved.

**Setting of the Study**

The community from which these parents hail, Millville, is small and urban. Its schools are desegregated. This western Massachusetts community has a population of 43,704 inhabitants (United States Census, 1990). Seventy three percent of the population is White, and twenty seven percent are of another race including Asian and Pacific Islander or American Indian, Eskimo and Aleutian Islander. Thirty one percent of those reporting for the 1990 U. S. Census indicated they were of Hispanic origin; the majority of those are Puerto Ricans. Millville has historically been a gateway city for immigrant groups. In the last several decades Millville has experienced a significant increase in its non-English speaking population as Puerto Rican and other Latinos move to the city.

The public schools enroll about 7,400 students. The Latino student population represents seventy percent of the total school population (Massachusetts Department of Education, 1991). On the
elementary school level the percentage of Puerto Rican students is seventy eight percent, and on the secondary school level that student population is fifty eight percent.

Millville has a high rate of poverty, as measured by the number of children eligible for free lunch. One of every two children who attend the local public schools comes from a home where AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) is the only source of income.

It has been a difficult decade for school funding. A heavy reliance on state and federal monies, while relieving Millville of its responsibilities under the property tax levies, has created uncertainty in school funding from one year to the next. Battles over school funding have been frequent. Parents have been no strangers to those battles.

In the mid 1980's the school district allocated resources to involve parents in school governance issues. State money provided an opportunity for parents and staff members to attend workshops and conferences. The conferences provided parents and educators from Millville with a support system and a network to gather information to help them establish a broad based parent involvement program for the district. As a result, parents presented the school committee with a proposal for a comprehensive parent involvement policy which was adopted in 1985.

Millville is home to a significant number of elderly voters and White voters, many of whom choose to send their children to parochial schools. This clash of age and culture, many have speculated, has resulted in the defeat of two override votes for the schools, and a general lack of interest in supporting the public
schools. Misinformation about bilingual education provided angry voters with yet another reason to vote against the schools. Urban folklore spread like wildfire about the child who had supposedly spent twelve years in a bilingual classroom and who couldn't speak a word of English upon graduation from high school. Politicians with their own agenda contributed to the negative stories about bilingual education despite data which indicated positive results. Economic bias prevailed.

Many parents of all ethnic groups saw through the political rhetoric. The effects of politics and funding mechanisms for education have thus been a catalyst for the involvement of many parents. Their involvement as advocates has come at a time when several key actions have intersected: first, the passage of Proposition 2 1/2 in 1980, which limited local contributions to education; second, the passage of the educational reform act in 1985, which legislated parent and community involvement using the vehicle of School Improvement Councils; third, the adoption by the school committee of a parent involvement policy; and fourth, the impact of local politics on the public schools.

**Significance of the Study**

Most research in parent involvement does not focus on the advocacy activities of parents, but on parent involvement as it relates to student achievement (Rich, 1985a; Epstein, 1987a; Ascher, 1986), or components needed to make parent involvement programs successful (Henderson, 1986, 1987; Cummings, 1983; Heleen, 1988).
This study of six parents in an urban school district contributes to the research on parent involvement because it focuses on the involvement of parents as they are directly influenced by contemporary political issues in an ever-changing landscape, an area of parent involvement research not heavily documented. The study is unique because a review of the literature for the past decade does not reveal other case studies of parents whose parental involvement activities are so highly political. The study is significant for four major reasons:

- the impact of local and state politics on parent involvement is explored;
- the effects of a decade of school budget debates on parent involvement is analyzed;
- the issues of parents catapulted into the political arena as they try to positively impact the kind of education their children will receive is reviewed;
- the impact of parental involvement on the political process is assessed.

This past decade has not been a quiet one on the political front, and public schools across Massachusetts have been the subject of much controversy, from public school kindergarten through public higher education. There is no decision made about or in public schools that has not become a political decision.

Parents have taken their activities, therefore, to a new level, and have insisted that their voices be heard. They have found the need to attend school committee meetings, town council meetings, and town
meetings in great numbers, all in an attempt to protect hard won gains in programs and services for their children. They have engaged in letter writing and telephone campaigns to influence the decisions being made on a daily basis in the state house and school board rooms which impact the quality and quantity of education their children receive.

Their activities have stopped some initiatives and secured others. While not voting members of the school committee, they have used their collective influence to counterbalance the national trend which would render to a generation of children, for the first time in the history of this country, less than that provided to the previous generation.

The implications of the activities of public school parents in Millville are especially significant for minority children, and for Puerto Rican children in particular. There can be no decision made by community leaders impacting the school budget which does not dramatically effect Puerto Rican children, whether that be in a positive or negative way. Puerto Rican children constitute the majority of students in every public school in the district.

The average age for White residents of Millville is forty two, while for Puerto Ricans it is eighteen. Seventy three percent of the population is White, while seventy percent of the public school population is Puerto Rican. This factor alone, aside from the issue of poverty, creates a clash of age and race.

When parents engage in political activities to support the public schools, they are impacting on the lives of the most disenfranchised segment of the population, those who are minority, and for the most
part, poor. Their continued involvement has had a positive impact on the quality of education and equal opportunity for children of Puerto Rican descent. Additions and modernization to overcrowded and outdated schools, securing all-day kindergartens for the district, monitoring school choice options, advocating for written translation of materials sent home and oral translation at meetings, and insistence that parents serve on task forces which review curriculum and programs have been among the items on the agenda of parent activists.

This study is significant because of its focus on the activities of parents whose children attend school in a district which is more than seventy percent Puerto Rican. The impact of their parental involvement activities can in no small measure effect the kind of programs the children in this community, the overwhelming number of whom are minority, receive. The way in which parents in this community are involved sets the stage for the way that politicians, administrators, and educators interact with parents across the district. Members of the school committee are White, with one exception, a Puerto Rican woman who represents a predominately Puerto Rican neighborhood. Three of the ten members of the committee have children in the public schools. The age of all the committee members is above the average White age of forty two of the community, with three members past retirement age. The same clash which exists in the community, the clash of age and race, is reflected between the committee and the students of the district. When Puerto Rican parents become involved in the schools, they bring an entirely different set of experiences to the front. With the
average age of Puerto Ricans in the community being eighteen, and
the average age of the committee being well above the average age of
White voters, the involvement and voice of Puerto Rican parents is
essential to change and growth in the schools.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to six participants, and while some
conclusions can be drawn from their responses, these are not typical
parents. All have a considerable amount of political savvy, all have
been involved in the schools in one capacity or another for more than
a decade, and all know, to varying degrees, how to use the system.
While not all of them came to the process aware of the potential
political ramifications of their involvement, these parents have come
to be recognized by other parents, administration, local politicians,
and members of the press as individuals who could be counted on to
have information about a school-related area and to have an opinion
on it. Other parents who have been less involved, or who would have
been chosen at random would provide very different results for the
data collection. These particular parents were chosen because of
their lengthy involvement and their political knowledge, and because
I know them well, trust them, value their opinions and experiences,
having shared a great deal of history with them when I worked with
them as a staff member in the area of parent involvement.

In spite of the fact that they have been heavily involved in the
politics of education, these parents represent an excellent cross
section of the community. Two of the parents are Latino, two are
men; they come from varying socioeconomic and educational
backgrounds, and have children in a variety of programs and schools within the district. One mother had recently placed two of her children in private school, but has them enrolled in public schools again in a different district. Another has children who have graduated from high school. Of the six, three have educational experience beyond the Bachelor's degree. Some are homeowners, others live in apartments. Some live in the more affluent neighborhoods; others in the most struggling.

My own long term involvement with these parents has provided me with recollections of events which I asked them to recall. For more than eight years I was a member of their community, and as such had many of the same experiences as they did. Although this precludes any objectivity on my part, it may also improve the quality of the data. The line of questioning developed for data collection was not used to prejudicially influence them, but rather to help the respondents recall and reflect on their activities in a comprehensive manner. My experience with the participants has provided me with a subjective framework from which to gather information, and distinguishes the ethnographic study from other forms of research (Goetz, LeCompte, 1984). I have been able to observe the behaviors of the culture over a sustained period. Harris (1980) has suggested that the most important aspect of a culture for investigators to consider is observable behavior, because what people say about what they do is less important than what they actually do.

This study would be different if conducted in an urban district with no resources committed to parent involvement, no cohesive and supportive way for parents to get information about district activities,
programs and policies. This study would be different in a suburban community without constraints on resources and where parents and local politicians were not in disagreement over funding or programs in education, or where parents were not provided with resources in the form of staff members who worked with them in parent involvement activities on the governance level. The study would also be different if I had not been involved in boundary spanning (Schensul, Schensul, Gonzales, Caro, 1981) where I became familiar with the behaviors, goals, and beliefs of the subjects and their constituencies, and where I was able to span the boundaries from my cultural group as educator to their cultural group as parent advocates.

The district is not typical in its approach to parent involvement. It is the only one in western Massachusetts, urban, suburban or rural, which has had several employees over the last decade whose responsibilities have included getting parents involved in a variety of ways, and a budget to back those activities. Even when significant reductions were made in the school budget in 1990 and 1991 which resulted in teacher layoffs, program cuts and larger class size, parental involvement programs were not eliminated, in large part because of the superintendent’s commitment to involving parents in decision making activities. This is a district in which central administration understood that organized, articulate, informed parents were its best allies. This is not true for other districts, and the desegregation plan afforded the district with the resources to implement its parent involvement program through a state funded grant. A structure is in place to afford parents an opportunity to
participate in activities at the school and district level. In urban settings, this is not uncommon. However, few smaller districts possess the financial resources to carry out such a plan for parent involvement, and therefore their involvement may not be as cohesive. Parents in this district have had many opportunities to develop their interest and expertise. There is continuously a pool of informed parents to call upon.

**Summary**

Parent involvement in Massachusetts, and in Millville in particular, has experienced a paradigm shift over the course of the last decade. Changes in state legislation, the passage of a state tax cap and Proposition 2 1/2 has created a climate in which parents are required to become politically involved in schools. As the means through which school budgets have been funded have become more political, so has the need for parental influence on those budgets changed. More than ever before, decisions about how much money is spent on public education, which programs will be funded, and how and what children should learn has been played out on the public stage. More and more people who have little or no connection to public schools, other than as residents concerned about holding onto their wallets, have made their voices heard on a variety of school issues. Many, if not most, of these same residents have neither had their own children in public schools nor have been in a public school other than to use a voting booth since they graduated from high school. As public education has become more politicized, parents of
public school children have found the need to become more political not only as a means to increase opportunities for their children, but to hold onto their hard won gains.

In the next chapter I will review the literature on parent involvement for the past decade, primarily as it impacts urban schools and their populations. I will review the literature on tax limiting initiatives in Massachusetts since 1980, on parent involvement in governance issues in Millville since 1985, on political issues effecting the funding of public schools, and on Massachusetts Education Reform debates.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The past decade in Massachusetts has been filled with ballot initiative petitions which have directly impacted the funding of public education in the Commonwealth. The passage of Proposition 2 1/2, in addition to its fiscal restrictions, has created an atmosphere which has made school governance highly politicized. Parent involvement across the state has been changed by the passage of Proposition 2 1/2 in particular, and a review of the literature on parent involvement for this particular study requires that the political influences be studied and reviewed as well.

The purpose of the literature review is to lay a foundation from which to explore the kinds of involvement that parents have historically and traditionally been involved in, and to juxtapose that with a review of tax cap initiatives and taxation in Massachusetts. Specifically, the review of literature in parent involvement focuses on minority parent involvement and on the involvement of parents who have been traditionally, by the way schools are structured, hard to reach.

The review of literature on tax cap initiatives in Massachusetts concentrates on the last decade and includes literature which chronicles the impact of tax caps on school budgets. It includes a review of legal briefs filed with the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court over the implementation of Proposition 2 1/2 as it relates to
school funding. The review includes published as well as unpublished documents from government agencies and advocacy groups dealing with the issue of taxation and the effects of tax cap proposals in Massachusetts. The juxtaposition of the parent involvement review and the tax limitation review will provide me with a framework from which to base my research.

Since this study explores the impact of local and state politics on parent involvement, analyzes the effects of a decade of school debates on parent involvement, and reviews the issues of parents catapulted into the political arena as they try to positively impact parental involvement in the political process, it is important to place those events in an historical context. The outside political forces throughout the Commonwealth have impacted the advocacy activities of the six participants, and a review of those forces helps to place their advocacy activities in context.

**Parent Involvement Literature**

Minority parent involvement, particularly because of the demographics of the community where the research is based, is an important part the literature review in this study. Just as an effective teaching setting will allow for many different approaches to teaching and learning, and effective instruction takes into consideration that adults as well as children learn and participate in a variety of ways, an effective parent involvement program will allow for parents to participate in a variety of ways. Exploring merely what is perceived to be traditional parent involvement would be too narrow a focus. The
literature on parent involvement must be inclusive and review many different kinds of involvement, not simply the governance type of activity which will be the focus of this research, because all types of parent involvement overlap and coexist, and a comprehensive review will often not allow for the separation of these.

None of the parents in this study ever engaged solely in advocacy activities. For example, as parents lobbied (advocacy: political) an elected official for funds for school programs, they were also acting as supporters because their actions assisted others; they acted as collaborators by assisting the school in their budgetary needs; they acted as advisors while informing elected officials on policy or program through budgetary requests.

A review of the literature for this study will be inclusive of the activities of parents from differing cultural backgrounds. The connections between the school and the home, the way the family is respected by the school, the manner in which the school reaches out to involve parents of differing ethnic groups is important for this literature review.

A review of literature on parent involvement or parent participation will use the following framework (Henderson, 1986):

- *parents as partners* where parents perform basic obligations for their child's education and social development such as seeing that they are properly clothed and fed;

- *parents as collaborators and problem solvers* where parents reinforce the school's efforts with their child and help to solve problems;
• *parents as audience*, wherein parents attend and appreciate performances and productions of their child’s and the school’s;

• *parents as supporters* where they provide volunteer assistance to teachers, the PAC, and to other parents;

• *parents as advocates* where parents are “watchdogs” and perform explicitly political activities;

• *parents as advisors and/or co-decision makers* who provide input on school policy and program through membership in ad hoc or permanent governance bodies.

The most common form of parent involvement, *parents as partners*, includes what we call the child rearing or parenting activities of providing food, clothing, shelter, and cognitive stimulation. In 1984, Missouri became the first state to mandate parenting programs for all school districts. Parents as Teachers (PAT) requires that school districts in Missouri offer free programs for parents on a voluntary basis in order to enhance child development and scholastic performance to families before the child is even born. A minimum of four home visits and four educational group sessions occur during an eight month period of time. Periodic screening through age four is conducted to detect developmental delay or advanced ability so that each child can be provided with the appropriate services to foster development (Hausman, 1989).

Since eighty seven percent of a child’s waking hours from birth to age 18 are spent under the influence of the home environment, that variable can determine the effectiveness with which a child learns
Parents act as partners when they perform basic obligations for their child's educational and social development (Henderson, 1981). Parents vary in their experience and skills, so some schools or school systems like those in Missouri play an active part in helping parents understand their important roles in helping to build positive conditions in the home for learning and behavior (Chavkin, 1989; Brown and Lueder, 1989). If the culture of the school and the culture of the family are at odds with each other, a difficult transition occurs when the child begins to attend school. Schools must be watchful of respecting the culture of the home while providing assistance to help parents ready their children for school.

When parents collaborate and solve problems, they participate in activities which, individually or collectively, in-school or at-home, contribute to the schools' efforts to instruct pupils and raise pupil achievement (Henderson, 1986). Such activities include well coordinated at-home tutoring programs, home-school communication, parent education designed to make parents more knowledgeable about what schools are trying to teach and how their children are progressing (Brown and Lueder 1989), and volunteer activities including in-school tutoring in basic skills or enrichment programs. Such assistance needs to provide for language differences in the home and school culture. Materials and personnel that are available to parents need to be in language-appropriate, culturally unbiased form. In addition, account must be taken to ensure that parents who are not literate are provided with a support service to assist them in their endeavors.
Parents are a great resource, but often do not have the confidence to understand all the ways they can contribute to the life of the school and the education of their own child. The greater burden rests with the school to develop ways which will assist parents in helping their children achieve. At-home teaching programs have been shown to be particularly effective ways to involve parents and improve student achievement, particularly with low income elementary school children (Becker, 1984). Surveying parents, finding out their strengths and interests, and then matching them with the goals of the school will enrich not only the lives of children, but their parents as well. Parents should be encouraged to share their experiences and culture with the school family. By showing respect and appreciation for the diverse community, the school celebrates the culture of the child and helps the child develop a more positive self image.

Low socioeconomic status does not have to be an insurmountable impediment. For example, it has been found that poor students who persevere at their homework can academically excel rich ones who do not (Walberg, Paschal and Weinstein, 1985). The primary motivating factor for homework performance appears to be the extent to which the parents care about, supervise, and encourage their children to complete assignments. A homework model known as the Parent-Aided Homework (PAH) model is one such activity designed to encourage and support parent involvement in the child’s homework (Harris, 1983). The model involves school personnel, particularly the guidance counselor and teacher, promoting study skills coupled with positive reinforcement for successfully
completing assignments. A follow up meeting is held between the parents and the school about six weeks after the program begins, for the purpose of discussing the successes as well as problems of the program. Although homework help can certainly take place without a PAH program, parental involvement is enhanced by the intervention and support of the school. Once again, the school must provide support, both written and oral, as well as personal, to parents whose language is not the language of the school.

Parents who attend school plays, concerts, field days and the like are participating as an *audience* (Henderson, 1986). The role of parents in this capacity is usually a passive one. More often than not, parents will be asked to collaborate by baking cookies or making coffee to be sold at the events as a school fundraiser. However, Benson (1980) has linked participation as an audience as significantly related to a student’s achievement. Notices for performances need to be sent to the home in the language of the home in order to be effective. Arrangements must be made to greet parents in their own language, and to explain the nature of the program in the appropriate languages.

Without a core of *supporters*, (Henderson, 1986) schools would be lacking a valuable body of partners. Parents who volunteer their assistance either to their child’s teacher, in the library, to provide enrichment or expertise for special programs, or parents who are organized as part of the PAC or PTO, enrich the school’s activities when they provide such assistance. Again, Benson (1980) cited that when parents participated as supporters there was a strong correlation to student achievement. Sometimes parents form
telephone trees or car pools to assist each other in parent-to-parent activities, or support networks in stressful situations when, for instance, a family has been left homeless because of a fire, or when a sick child undergoes a serious period of hospitalization. Parents can be asked to coordinate such activities by language and by neighborhood.

Parents who are involved in advocacy activities are those whose citizen action is explicitly political. That is, the term advocacy refers to activities designed to influence policies – directives for schools to do something different – and to make sure that those directives are implemented. Acting as a “watchdog” is an example of this kind of activity. Advocacy groups are generally self-directed, although they are often involved in cooperative ventures with the schools. Advocacy groups exist in a variety of neighborhoods and for a variety of cultures. Schools should make efforts to make connections with advocacy groups which service the parents of the children who are enrolled in their school. Advocacy groups can help create strong links between the home and the school.

A review of the literature shows that effective parent involvement models are designed to include a variety of forms of parent involvement (Henderson, 1986; Rich, 1985; Zerchykov, 1985; Freedman, 1989). A review also includes literature on parent involvement programs that are comprehensive and long-lasting and that have the most effect on students and their performance (Gordon, 1979).

Most educators believe parents have the greatest influence on a child’s learning (Olson, 1990). The Institute for Responsive Education
of Boston (IRE) has placed emphasis on the goal of achieving instructional effectiveness for poor and minority children. IRE has designed many programs, as well as conducted volumes of research which points to the importance of involving parents in this process (Davies 1982, 1987, 1988, 1989; Heleen 1988; Zerchykov 1985).

According to Don Davies of IRE (1988), much activity occurs under the label of “school effectiveness” or “school improvement” that simply skirts the difficult issue of educating disadvantaged children. Dorothy Rich, (1985), Henderson, (1986), and Epstein, (1985) assert that since parents know their children better than anyone else that they ought to have a significant say about what happens at the school. This say must include the voices of parents whose language is other than English. They, too, know their children better than anyone else, and must be connected with programs and activities of the school community as active partners.

At the California School for the Deaf in Fremont, they understand that personal contact is especially important in involving Latino parents, and continuously phone parents and do personal home visits (Twilling, 1988). Parent participation at the school is consistently high because of these efforts. Since parents, particularly Latino parents, are not accustomed to being invited to school, they may assume that attending an activity at the school will not be useful to them.

McLaughlin and Shields (1987) found that parent councils have continued to survive when they have served important and bureaucratic functions. They found that low income parents are less likely to be willing to serve on councils where they serve in
unsubstantive roles. Low-income, minority or non-English speaking parents are less likely to participate in school events, especially if there are few minority parents in the school and if they are not made to feel welcome.

Parent involvement is like a triangle, with fewer and fewer parents moving into the smaller segment of the triangle, that of decision maker (Zerchykov, 1985). Parents who understand the system better will become more active partners in school reform (Weiss, 1990). The process in involving parents more fully in the system is one which requires hard work, particularly if the language and experiences of the administrators and staff are not the same as many of the students and their families. Parents who act as supporters or as advocates and decision makers are involved in activities which impact the school as a whole, and it is therefore sometimes less clear that the activities will have a positive impact on their own child. Nonetheless, the more parents participate in a variety of activities, the more the quality of the school environment improves, because those activities convey a clear message to administrators and teachers that parents are willing to work to make improvement, and staff are then more willing to engage other parents in activities (Epstein, 1984; Gordon, 1979; Davies, 1986).

T. C. Wagenaar (1977) comprehensively analyzed the impact on achievement of various kinds of citizen and parent involvement. He conducted a study where he investigated the correlations between performance at 135 schools and levels and types of community involvement and support at each of the schools. He concluded that there exists a continuum of parent and citizen involvement, all of
which include home-school communications, participation in decision making, and the mobilization of community resources, including fund raising and political support, voter turnout and support for school bond issues.

Wagenaar found that parent involvement generally does make a difference; schools with higher achievement are more open to parent and community involvement while more “closed” schools have lower achievement levels and less community support. Comer (1988) and Sandfort (1987) also found this to be true. While reports are generated about school dropouts, especially minority dropouts, and the drain on society, much must be done to ensure that students stay in school through involving their parents in meaningful activities.

Whether their reasons be philosophic or pragmatic, parents and citizens should and can be significantly involved in school affairs – from decision making to exchanging information to giving support, especially in those efforts which are designed to make schools instructionally effective for all children (Zerchykov, 1985). In Sioux Falls, South Dakota, a program which requires parents to sign contracts and contribute time to the school has resulted in a cohesive school community with a student waiting list for enrollment. Parents serve as aides and as advisors for student activities; they publish the school newspaper, produce and direct a weekly video news program, and work with the student council. The parent volunteer generates the list of these activities for participation (Heath, 1984). At the end of the year, parents participate with the staff in evaluating the school’s instructional program as it matches the written philosophy. Parents also conduct computer classes or correct papers at home at night. In
two predominantly low-income schools in New Haven, Connecticut, Comer developed a model which attempts to break down the barriers of distrust by involving parents in decision making and in activities directly supportive of the school programs. Comer formed governing councils of parents and educators who took responsibility for the organization and delivery of service at school. The elimination of parental apathy and the improvement of student achievement were the results of the program.

While one kind of participation does not always beget another, where there are higher levels of parent participation in decision making on a community wide level, there are also higher levels of participation in co-production types of activities (Zerchykov, 1985). In communities where parents are recognized as being able to influence policy, they are taken far more seriously as a collective than in communities where this does not happen. Educators and politicians who understand that parents are a force to be listened to generally find more ways for parents to interact with the school and with their children at home, rather than wait for parents to forcibly demand such activities.

A closer look at the review of the “Phi Delta Kappa Gallup Poll of Attitudes Toward Education” over a decade indicates that while the public is making demands on the schools, it has not withdrawn support from schools or teachers. Although neither the general public nor parents want to run the schools personally, there is an indication that they want some measure of involvement (Kappan, 1984, 1989). The September, 1989 poll shows that parents want more input or choice in the make-up and quality of their child’s school.
Gallup Poll further documented that the public believes that parents should indeed have more say than they do now in schools.

The days when education was a process outside and separate from the family are over. At least four significant, sometimes contradictory, changes are occurring. First, the school is no longer on a pedestal. Not long ago, it was thought that schools had all the answers. They were the sources of information. People went to school to start learning. Today, it is known that children learn before school and after school as well.

Second, the age of experts is increasingly giving way to ideas of self-help. Many people outside of school, including parents, have as much or more formal education than teachers. This is a major change in education.

A third factor is that information today is received by everyone at the same time. Teachers learn about current events and new scientific discoveries at the same time everyone else learns about them through news stories on television and in the newspaper and magazines.

Finally, parents are looking to the schools to deal with problems other than academic ones more and more, especially in the area of family and social concerns. Working parents are asking schools to address child care needs (Fruchter, 1984). Parents of teenagers look to schools for advice about drug and sex issues (Sandfort, 1987). The implications of these changes for home-school partnership are that parents and teachers want and need different kinds of support from each other. Education for both groups, both parents and school employees, is crucial to the success of schools.
Building level administrators are uncertain about the role they should play with parents and the role parents should play in their school, yet are key to developing strong school-community relationships. In high achievement schools with pupils of low socioeconomic status, principals report the community as being more supportive than in low achieving schools (Zerchykov, 1985).

Family involvement can dramatically improve the academic achievement of students who were previously failing (Freedman, 1989). In order for families to become greater partners in their children’s education, schools must rethink the ways in which parents are encouraged to be involved. Using the traditional approaches with traditionally involved parents will only serve to shore up the achievement of already successful students. Children who are in most need of their family’s involvement in their schooling need programs which cut through traditional approaches to parent involvement and find ways to engage those families traditionally the most disenfranchised from schools.

There are many roles for parents to play in their children’s schools. Parents assist at home by encouraging students to do well and by monitoring their homework, supervising television viewing, talking to them and sharing their good times as well as bad. Children whose parents spend time with them reviewing and assisting with their homework assignments are more likely to do better in school than children with similar family backgrounds and ability. High school seniors, for example, who were enrolled in Head Start or other similar pre-school programs where there was a strong parental involvement component consistently outperformed their
peers in school (Freedman, 1989). Often, the support given to parents through Head Start and other similar programs appear to be the only source of external support for the family. A report released by the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee indicates that parents who participate in Head Start programs show improved ways of child rearing. In addition, such programs helped them to seek employment and further their own education (Cohen, 1990). Parents and other citizens can provide direct resources for instruction through volunteer tutoring, homework hotlines and home tutoring.

The intergenerational cycle of poverty can be broken through education. When schools reach out to train, support and involve families of at-risk students, the rewards are great. Parents continue to teach their children, but the school assumes an even greater role (Freedman, 1989; Davies, 1989; Zerchykov, 1985). Parents who are poor but who communicate on a regular basis with their children, provide strong encouragement for their academic interests, and monitor how their children spend their time are more likely to have high achievers (Clark, 1983; Walberg, 1985; Dornbusch, 1988).

More regular, positive contact between school and home, whether in person or in the form of written communication, makes a difference in student achievement (Zerchykov, 1985). But when parent involvement is seen as a peripheral activity that is not integrated into the main work of the schools (Rich, 1985), its implementation is haphazard and inconsistent.

Written communication can, however, be a barrier to parent involvement. One-way messages such as bulletins, report cards,
notices of special meetings or events, and even handbooks and policies are sent home to parents on a regular basis; sometimes these messages alienate parents (Herrera, 1988), or are in a language parents cannot understand. In addition, the message may reach homes where the parents are not literate, breaking the cycle of communication. Personal contact is essential, particularly in urban school districts. In a case study, the effects of miscommunication between the school and a Mexican-American mother who had herself attended school in the United States was documented by Herrera and Wooden (1988). Her third child was placed in a bilingual classroom following a Home Language Survey. The school did not effectively explain the merits of Spanish language instruction over English language instruction or the purpose of the survey form, and the mother found herself philosophically at odds with the school.

School based strategies tend not to engage the participation of low income parents, but home based programs do. School based activities designed for middle class parents continue to involve middle class parents (McLaughlin, 1987). The attitudes of staff, whether conscious or unconscious, oftentimes keeps or drives parents away (Dornbusch, 1988). Schools which do not work to involve parents allow education and socioeconomic status to dictate which parents are involved (Epstein, 1989). In order to increase the involvement of minority parents, programs must be designed which are sensitive to their needs, culture, and language. Since programs off-site, such as home-based ones, are more effective with low income parents, schools which include low-income students need to consider that in their long range planning.
In other research, Rich (1985) found that the socioeconomic status of parents has a direct impact on parent involvement in schools. The higher the socioeconomic status of parents, the more likely they are to be involved in their children’s schooling. However, the fact that parents who are in a higher socioeconomic bracket are more likely to be involved in their child’s schooling only means that the school must work more creatively to involve parents of low socioeconomic status in the life of the school. It is just not true that poor parents care less about their children. It is only true that schools have not normally developed strategies to involve traditionally hard-to-reach parents.

A federally sponsored study of eighth graders, their parents and teachers, conducted in 1988 by the National Educational Longitudinal Survey confirmed that upper-income, well-educated parents devote more attention to their children’s education than do poorer parents with less schooling. The report indicated that those with higher incomes and more schooling were more likely to initiate contacts with schools, and that Latino parents were less likely than White or African American parents to talk with their children about school (Rothman, 1990). Advocates argue that most low-income and minority parents are too consumed by the demands of work and caring for their family to manage time for involvement in schools (Fruchter, 1984).

Parents whose culture is the non-majority culture and who are from linguistically diverse backgrounds may be uncomfortable with the schools because they sense - or they know - that the school devalues their diversity. While educators cling to the middle class
image of families, they will not be able to address the needs of a
diverse parent population (Lightfoot, 1978). Some families are under
such economic stress that their need to attend to the basics of food,
shelter, clothing and safety takes precedence over being involved in
their children’s schooling.

These are the very parents school staff need to reach so they feel
more comfortable with the school and can better support their
children’s progress. Increasing the achievement of children who are
least well-served by the public schools must be one of the continuing
goals of the parent involvement movement. The issue in
parent/citizen participation is not only what parents can do – and
they can do a lot – to improve the academic performance of their own
children. The issue is what they can do to improve the ability of the
schools – what they pay for as taxpayers – to be instructionally
effective for all children, and not just the children of active
participants (Zerchykov, 1985).

Much of the research done by the Institute for Responsive
Education indicates that most educators appear to be proceeding as if
school effectiveness is an in-house professional/technical effort in
which the traditions of minimal, strictly-limited participation by
Zerchykov, 1985).

A survey conducted by the Center for Research on Elementary
Education and Middle Schools (CREMS) at the Johns Hopkins
University in Baltimore, Maryland, found that a third of the parents
surveyed had no conference with a teacher during the year. About 60
percent had never talked with a teacher on the phone. And although
more than 95 percent of surveyed teachers reported that they communicated with parents, most parents reported that they had never been involved in deep or frequent discussions with teachers about their children’s progress (Epstein, 1989).

Not all educators know how to communicate with parents. Inservice training for teachers and administrators on home-school contacts also makes a difference in student achievement (Zerchykov, 1985). A study of Title VII teacher training programs to ascertain their role in promoting parent involvement among their students revealed that only fourteen percent offered courses which deal specifically with parent involvement (Nieto, 1987). Chavkin and Williams (1988) in similar research of southern states found that only four percent of the 575 teacher educators had been taught a course in parent involvement, and 86.6% felt that training was necessary.

Teachers also need assistance in developing ways to share positive reinforcement with parents on their children’s progress in school. In addition, and perhaps most important of all, teachers need assistance in designing creative parent-child activities that help to enhance a child’s learning capabilities and bring a positive measure of pleasure and satisfaction to the parent (Berninger and Rodriguez, 1989).

In bilingual as in other programs, the actual practice of delivering parent involvement courses is far removed from the philosophical and policy level of states and the federal government. It is not the lack of commitment, but the apparent lack of resources which prohibits this from happening. One has to wonder about the possible re-distribution of resources if the concept is as well received
as the indicators state. Finding ways for schools to establish family support in education is strategic use of scarce public resources. Minor input of staff time and materials means the possibility of a major outpouring of parent support. Getting help from families means building a stronger educational and political base (Zerchykov, 1985).

Research has pointed out that when teachers develop strategies to involve parents in their classroom, those parents have a more positive attitude about the amount of work a teacher does and about the teacher's overall ability, and are more likely to support what happens in school (Epstein, 1987(b)). Epstein (1984) and Berliner (1985) found that when real communication about homework assistance and follow-through occurred between teacher and parents, parents almost always did what the teacher asked them to support their child's growth and achievement.

**Review of Political Literature**

The past decade in Massachusetts has been filled with ballot initiative petitions which have directly impacted the funding of public education in the Commonwealth. The passage of Proposition 2 1/2, in addition to its fiscal restrictions, has created an atmosphere which has made school governance highly politicized. Parent involvement across the state has been changed by the passage of Proposition 2 1/2 in particular, and a review of the literature on parent involvement for this particular study requires that the political influences be studied and reviewed as well.
The passage of Proposition 2 1/2 is a confluence of a series of political and economic events and trends occurring in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the nation (Sitzer, Flanagan, Karvellis, 1981). The most direct influence, according to this report, was the passage of Proposition 13 (Jarvis-Gunn initiative) in California the previous year. Unlike California, however, Massachusetts had no state budget surplus to use as a source of new aid for local municipalities (Ladd and Wilson, 1981; Sitzer, Flanagan, Karvellis, 1981). Two hundred years after the Boston Tea Party, Massachusetts voters launched yet another significant tax revolt when they successfully challenged the concept of local governments to tax real property "without limitation as to the rate or amount" (Sitzer, Flanagan, Karvellis, 1981; Torto and Raimondo, 1987).

A review of literature in the State House Library in Boston on Proposition 2 1/2 and taxation of published as well as unpublished documents provided a variety of focuses, both technical and demographic. In explaining why the electorate approved the tax limiting initiative, Ladd and Wilson (1981) surveyed voter-heads of households. Sixty five percent believed that their services would be better than if not the same as before their vote, and that almost eighty percent wanted to shift the cost of education funding from the local property tax base to the state, particularly in the area of special education. This finding is consistent with the mood of the community which is the subject of this study, and twenty five of those interviewed in this particular report were from that same community.

Public school funding in Massachusetts has always been tied to the property tax, and because of this, educational funding has been
consistently unequal across the Commonwealth. The Massachusetts property tax has been very unpopular, to the point where many residents refer to the state as “Taxachusetts.” Torto and Raimondo (1987) reported that it has been criticized by politicians and academics, and citizens regularly protest it. As early as 1786 it was attacked by Bullock, and in 1936 it was said that if criticism could kill the property tax, it would have been dead a century ago.

A report prepared by United States Congressman Barney Frank (1981) indicated that the older, poorer communities would be the hardest hit by Proposition 2 1/2. Many of the poorer communities would no longer be able to sustain a “maintenance of effort” requirement to make an even match for federal grants, particularly benefits under programs for educationally deprived children.

Bradbury, Ladd & Christopherson (1982) conducted an impact assessment one year after the passage of Proposition 2 1/2. They found two undesirable effects of the tax limiting proposal. Small, wealthy communities were able to raise twice as much revenue from property taxes as resource-poor jurisdictions, thus increasing the disparities in education across communities. They found that local education expenditures were forty seven percent of the total local expenditures in Massachusetts in 1980. This is significant, they pointed out, because it is difficult for communities to make substantial reductions in overall budgets without making comparable reductions in school budgets, particularly because of the loss of fiscal autonomy. Between 1981 and 1982, the first year of the implementation of Proposition 2 1/2, communities of like size as the community in this study experienced a 9.6 percent decrease in their
school committee budgets, while municipal revenue losses were at 5.9 percent.

An anticipated revenue decrease by more than one billion dollars was expected by the time the law was fully implemented, with revenue reductions of five hundred million in the first year (Maffei, 1981). General revenue sharing, a particularly important component of the federal budget for resource-poor communities, will be affected because the local tax contribution is one of the criteria for allocating funds.

Merrill Lynch Pierce Fenner & Smith, Inc. published a report in March, 1981, providing an analysis for the effects on older, poorer communities and their ability to float bond issues as a result of the passage of Proposition 2 1/2. They were of the opinion that Massachusetts was fertile ground for tax limiting initiatives. The legislature had been passing unfunded mandates on local governments for years, including special education and bilingual education. The state did not allow local communities the ability to impose sales or income taxes to provide revenue, such as New York State has allowed. The result was a growing pressure to raise the property tax to provide municipal services.

Approximately 8.3 percent of all Massachusetts families are below the official federal poverty line, but the residents of Millville are poorer in greater numbers. The tax burden for the poor is 8.4 percent of their income, while 3.6 percent for the average taxpayer. An additional 8.4 percent of the population is “near poor,” those with incomes between $7,500 and $15,000. One quarter of the Commonwealth’s poor are homeowners (Reschovsky, 1986). This
puts a disproportionate burden of taxation on the poor and thus on poorer communities.

Cities tend to cut services rather than raise taxes (Tannenwald, Perrault, Wattenberg, 1987). As taxpayers become frustrated with municipal budget battles and migrate to communities with relatively strong tax positions, the tax bases of communities with weak fiscal positions further erode at a time when the need of their residents and employers for public services is increasing. This combination contributes to the spiral of fiscal decline evident in many older communities. The community being studied is ranked three hundred fortieth in terms of wealth of the three hundred fifty one cities and towns in the Commonwealth.

Over the past decade, the Massachusetts Legislature has been involved in several educational reform proposals, and to each of these reform proposals has been attached money (Cohen, 83, 84, 85, 86, 88, 89, 90; Dabalis, 1985). In addition, the General Court of Massachusetts has debated the issue of school funding and bail-outs for distressed districts for as long, if not longer (Cohen, 83, 84, 85, 86, 88, 89, 90; Mohl, 1989; Fulham, 1989; Hart, 1989; Michelson, 1988; Lupo, 1990; Coakley, 1990). Local communities, particularly poorer ones, have felt the burden of budget cuts (Cohen, Dabalis, Fulham, Mohl, Hart, Michelson, Lupo, Coakley), and parents have challenged the funding of education by property taxes through the Courts. McDuffy v. Robertson (formerly referred to as Webby v. Dukakis, Webby v. King, Murdock v. Dukakis) seeks to remedy the archaic way of funding education based on the wealth of a community (Lewis,
Parents have been involved through lobbying efforts and as petitioners as the debate continues.

Jonathan Kozol might as well have been writing about Millville when he published *Savage Inequalities* in 1991. In his tour of thirty neighborhoods he found that this nation has turned its back on the Brown v. Board of Education (347 US 483), and that few school reforms have reached the inner cities. His journey took him to schools where no self-respecting business leader would think of working. He points out the inequities in education funding based on the property tax.

In Chicago, as elsewhere, business associations have lobbied against tax increases to finance public education. Kozol points out that business oftentimes attempts to portray themselves as partners, when mostly what they offer is superficial and for publicity. “The same political figures who extol the role of business have made certain that these poor black people would have no real choice. Cutting back the role of government and then suggesting that the poor can turn to businessmen who lobbied for such cuts is cynical indeed,” wrote Kozol.

Inequality in per pupil expenditures is glaring. For example, in New York City in 1987, the expenditure was $5,500 per pupil, while at the same time, just outside the city limit on the north shore of Long Island in Great Neck, it rose above $11,000 per pupil, with the highest districts in the state spending more than $15,000 per pupil.

A review of the literature in the political arena is related to this study of parent involvement because of the expressly political
activities of the six parents in this study. It is important to understand the political context in which their actions were taken.

Summary

The literature review of parent involvement shows that there is a strong correlation between the amount of parent involvement and the success of children in schools. Schools where parents are encouraged to participate receive higher percentages of involved parents than where that does not occur. In a climate of diminishing resources for public education, that involvement can make all the difference in defining what resources are allocated to educate children. In a community where minority children comprise the majority of the student population, it is important to make sincere, well planned attempts to involve the parents of these children in the schools. For Puerto Rican parents in particular, the efforts must be sensitive to the cultural and linguistic diversity of the culture of the family.

Since the passage of Proposition 2 1/2 in 1980, parent involvement and politics have been inseparable. Parents have moved to the forefront in local communities as advocates for children in an ever shrinking fiscal climate. The activities of parents, particularly in districts where children are poor and where parents are often disenfranchised, have a significant impact on policy making and school financing. While outside forces, including business and politicians, strive to set an agenda for schools, parents have been
required out of necessity to become more passionate in their attempts to secure equal educational opportunities for their children.

In the next chapter I will describe the methodology used to gather the data for the study, and the ethnographic data from the six parents whose interviews were taped and transcribed.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Many of my colleagues and friends have been politically involved with the public schools of Massachusetts for more than a decade, some for short, specific periods of time, while others have taken the task on as a second profession. For many of us, our political activities grew out of our union involvement and became closely tied to economic security and justice.

As a young girl growing up on Long Island, I vividly recall scenes of my mother on the phone as she dialed her list of mothers from our school. She was the president of the Mothers’ Club, but her activities were tame compared to those described in this study. She and the other mothers organized holiday parties, organized bazaars, brought flowers from their yards for graduations and religious ceremonies, and baked cupcakes for special events. Her commitment to the school left me with the lasting impression that this was what parents should and must do.

When I began to work with parents in the mid 1980’s, I was surprised to see the intensity and depth with which they approached school issues. I was untrained for this phenomenon. I had been a junior high art teacher, and it was a rare parent who came to see me about any issue. I never saw parents in the building. There was no PTO. Yet the parents with whom I worked wanted information about school organization, schools of choice, dropout prevention,
desegregation, and advocacy training. These parents wanted to change the school committee agenda to make it more open, and insisted on being able to discuss items on the school committee agenda prior to a vote. These same parents wanted to be able to participate as equals at school committee subcommittee meetings and budget hearings. As taxpayers and parents they wanted to come to the table as partners and collaborators, not as outsiders. I found that my initial surprise was shared by many of my colleagues and friends. The passion with which these parents participated in governance activities matched, and in many cases exceeded, that of my colleagues. What was it then that drove these parents, what motivated them, despite the many obstacles placed before them by a somewhat alien system? I found myself continuously curious about the political activities and motivations of parents, of their struggles, their successes and failures, their stamina. I found myself respecting them and their political savvy more than I had ever imagined. Their activities had taken on an explicitly political tone.

Research questions which the study explores are for what reasons parents participate in parent involvement through governance activities; how has the political climate of the last decade influenced the types of activities in which parents engage; why do parents make governance activities their priority; how were their earlier experiences in parent involvement similar to or different from the types of activities they find themselves engaged in now; how did their earlier impressions of their involvement differ from the current climate for parent involvement; and what types of parent
involvement, given the current political climate of the Commonwealth, are the most important now?

The parents were asked to respond to a series of questions on which I based the research. They were asked to describe their involvement in the schools; how they became involved; what changes they have seen in the schools since the passage of Proposition 2 1/2; how their involvement has changed because of the passage of Proposition 2 1/2; and what they perceive to be the future implications for parent involvement activities.

What I wanted to find out, through this qualitative study, was how their involvement was impacted by local and state politics; what effect a decade of school budget reduction did to their participation; what kinds of issues arose as they became more involved; and what impact their involvement has had on the political process.

It is for this reason that I decided to undertake this qualitative study to ascertain what it was about the political climate of the last decade that motivated, empowered, and changed the activities of Beth Coffey, Kate Lee, Eduardo Rodriguez, Daniel Erklauer, María Sanchez and Kay Cole. I have used their own voices in the development of case studies in Chapter IV. The clarity with which they articulate their commitment to public education, the compassion with which they speak about the benefits of living in a diverse community and the uniqueness of their story is the reason I have used their words to illustrate their journey.

In this chapter I will describe the questions I used to elicit data from the participants; provide background and demographic information about the community of Millville; describe why
qualitative research was used; paint a picture of the participants; and describe how the data was collected, managed, and analyzed.

Description of the Approach

The research approach will consist of taped interviews of six parents from Millville, Massachusetts, including the following general questions:

A - Why do you participate in governance/leadership activities?
   - What led you to this?
   - For what reasons?
   - Why do you continue?

B - Over the last decade, 2 1/2 and a state cap have been voted on at the state level; desegregation has come to the district; you’ve seen several mayoral changes, school committee changes, and numerous changes in administration. Some would say that it has been a struggle financially - two overrides have failed. Yet you continue to be involved. Why? Has this influenced the kind of activities you’ve been engaged in and what were they?

C - Why were these particular activities a priority for you?
D - When you first became involved, were the activities different from those you’re involved in now?
- What were those reasons?
- Did politics (state or local) influence your decisions?

E - When you first became involved, you obviously had your reasons (cited in question #1). Do you see the reasons you’re involved now different from what you expected parent involvement would be?
- What’s different about this current climate that makes your activities different?

F - Given the current political climate of the state and community, what types of parent involvement are the most important for your community?

G - You’ve had time to think about this interview. What didn’t I ask that you think should be mentioned?

By juxtaposing the qualitative research with the literature in parent involvement and data from the political arena the study will assess how their involvement was impacted by state and local politics; what effect a decade of school budget reduction did to their participation; what kinds of issues arose as the parents became more involved; and what impact their involvement has had on the political process.
The community from which these parents hail, Millville, is small and urban. Its schools are desegregated. This western Massachusetts community has a population of 43,704 inhabitants (United States Census, 1990). Seventy three percent of the population is White, and twenty seven percent indicating another race including Asian and Pacific Islander, or American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleutian (United States Census, 1990). In answer to a separate question concerning race, thirty one percent of the 43,704 inhabitants reporting indicated that they were of Hispanic origin, the majority of whom are Puerto Rican. Of the Hispanic population, about a half are under the age of 18, and of the White population, about twenty one percent are under the age of eighteen (United States Census, 1990).

Millville has historically been a gateway city for immigrant groups. Millville was originally agrarian, and the first mills were built in the 1850’s. The early laborers were uneducated, unskilled Irish who sought not only freedom from the hunger of the Famine in Ireland, but who sought religious and political freedom from England as well. In the 1860’s, German families arrived from Rhineland and Saxony. These were trained textile workers who had previous experience in woolen mills. By 1902, one third of Millville’s population was French Canadian. Women who were accustomed to embroidery and other handiwork quickly became deft at weaving and threading bobbins for the textile mills. In 1888, the first wave of Polish immigrants arrived to make Millville their home. In the last several decades Millville has experienced another significant increase in its non-English speaking
population as Puerto Rican and other Latinos move to the city, the first of whom were brought to pick tobacco and other crops in the valley as migrant farm workers. They settled in Millville because the numerous tenements, originally inhabited by the other immigrant groups as they arrived, provided affordable housing.

The public schools enroll about 7,400 students. The Latino student population, over ninety five percent of which is Puerto Rican, represents seventy percent of the total school population (Massachusetts Department of Education, 1991). On the elementary school level the percentage of Puerto Rican students is seventy eight percent, and on the secondary school level that student population is fifty eight percent. The Puerto Rican growth figures between 1970 and 1990 represented more than a two hundred twenty seven percent jump in the Puerto Rican population of Millville. The median age for this group is 18 years of age while the average age for non-Puerto Ricans is 42. Puerto Ricans as a group are the state’s poorest, with thirty seven percent living below the poverty level (United States Census, 1990).

Millville has a high rate of poverty, as measured by the number of children eligible for free lunch. One of every two children who attend the local public schools comes from a home where AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) is the only source of income. Just over eight thousand residents receive public assistance.

Since 1985, there have been numerous plant and business closings representing more than 700 jobs. Although there have been some new businesses and expansions of existing businesses, the
unemployed population in Millville often does not have the literacy
skills needed to fill even entry level positions.

In addition to these issues of poverty, it has been a difficult
decade for school funding. A heavy reliance on state and federal
monies, while relieving Millville of its responsibilities under the
property tax levies, has created uncertainty in school funding from
one year to the next. Relying on the political biases of elected
politicians within Millville who answer to constituencies other than
those interested in the education of children has resulted in battles
for school funding. These battles are played out in the press and
through long and arduous consultations between Massachusetts
Department of Education staff and local political and educational
leaders. Parents continue to monitor consent decrees, to file suit, and
to communicate with members of the Massachusetts Board of
Education as well as members of the Legislative Committee on
Education to support their efforts to secure quality public education
for their children.

The school district allocated resources, through its commitment
to implementing the desegregation consent decree, to involving
parents in school governance issues. State money, in the form of a
Chapter 636 voluntary desegregation grant, provided an opportunity
for parents and staff members to attend workshops and conferences
which complemented the system wide goals of the school district of
including parents in decision making. Parental Involvement
conferences sponsored by the Institute for Responsive Education, the
Massachusetts Department of Education, APPLE Corps from
Atlanta, and the San Diego Public Schools provided parents with an
opportunity to meet leading advocates and researchers in the field including Don Davies, Dorothy Rich, Nancy Chavkin, Joyce Epstein, Ann Henderson, and Ross Zerchykov. The conferences provided parents and educators from Millville with a support system and a network to gather information to help them establish a broad based parent involvement program for the district.

As a result of parental and educator attendance at state and national conferences on parent involvement, parents presented the school committee with a proposal for a comprehensive parent involvement policy in 1985. The authors of the proposal were no longer content with parent participation being strong in some schools and virtually non-existent in others. They wanted to know the parameters for parent involvement, and what resources the district was willing to commit to the process. They wanted administrative accountability, and an avenue of redress if they felt an administrator denied them access to parent involvement “beyond the bake sale” (Henderson, 1986).

The school committee adopted a parent involvement policy which outlined how parents would be afforded access to parental participation. The superintendent assigned a staff member to coordinate the activities of parents, and a comprehensive election process took place. The director of Chapter 636 allocated other staff resources and a budget to assist in the implementation of the newly created parent involvement policy so that efforts could be made beyond the traditional PTO activities into training parents in computers and homework help, and in organizing workshops of health issues and an adolescent issues series. The parents
interviewed for this study were either authors of the parent involvement policy, or during its first year of implementation became catalysts for an involvement which would change parent involvement in Millville for the major portion of a decade.

Millville is limited in financial resources. The school department budget, despite the limiting effects of Proposition 2 1/2, is about one half of the municipal budget, with a heavy reliance on state funding. Depending on the fiscal year, Millville finds itself in one of the bottom ranked districts statewide for school spending, despite the fact that Chapter 70 (state education related) aid as well as Equal Educational Opportunity Grant money provides the community with more money than is actually spent on education.

Millville is home to a significant number of elderly and White voters, many of whom choose to send their children to parochial schools, while the school population of approximately 7,400 students is more than seventy percent minority. This clash of age and culture, many have speculated, has resulted in two overrides for the schools being defeated at the voting booth, and a general lack of interest in supporting the public schools. Misinformation about bilingual education and a recurring theme of "they didn't have bilingual education when I was in school or when my parents went to school" provided angry voters with yet another reason to vote against the schools. "Let them learn English, anyway. This is America!" became a battle cry. Urban folklore spread like wildfire about the child who had spent twelve years in a bilingual classroom and who couldn't speak a word of English upon graduation. Politicians with their own agenda contributed to the stories about bilingual education despite
being provided with data which indicated other results. Economic bias prevailed as voters talked about “those people” (translation: Puerto Ricans) “who don’t pay taxes anyway.” No thought is given to the fact that landlords pay property tax from the rent collected from those same people.

Many parents saw through the political rhetoric and were wary enough to try to protect the educational rights of their children. They organized political action committees, held fund raisers to pay for printing and advertising, wrote letters to the editor and spoke on behalf of the public schools in an effort to pass the overrides. The effects of politics and funding mechanisms for education have thus been a catalyst for the involvement of many parents, none of whom in this study has either the time or resources to make parent involvement a hobby or a cause célèbre. Their involvement as advocates has come at a time when several key actions have intersected. First, the passage of Proposition 2 1/2 in 1980, which limited local contributions to education; second, the passage of the educational reform act in 1985, which legislated parent and community involvement using the vehicle of School Improvement Councils; third, the adoption by the school committee of a parent involvement policy; and fourth, the impact of local politics on the public schools.

Use of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research through audio taped interviews is a key component of this research. Only through personalized, authentic,
anecdotal review of parent involvement is the study able to take on meaning and life. The qualitative research approach has provided me with a framework with which to ask questions in the attempt to peel away and reveal in-depth meaning to the activities each parent participated in and why. The use of qualitative research has allowed me to find common threads among the participants in this study in a way I would otherwise not have explored had this study been conducted with another, more confining method. The qualitative nature of the study has allowed the participants a free-flowing method to recall their participation in the schools over more than a decade without being restricted to responses which I would have subjectively framed.

Participants

The identity of each of the six parents will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms are used to protect their identity. The participants were afforded an opportunity to select their own pseudonyms. Only Kay Cole selected her own, one she uses when she calls the local newspaper for comment.

Participants for this qualitative case study were selected from a wide pool of possible candidates. There were many parents from the community who would have been able to provide a broad array of responses to questions posed for research. These parents were carefully selected because of their diverse socioeconomic, gender, ethnic, political and educational backgrounds, their wealth of experience, and because of their history of standing up for their
beliefs in difficult circumstances. Two were products of the Millville Public Schools, one attended parochial schools as a child, and of the three with education beyond high school, their experience was both in private and public higher education institutions. None of the subjects are employees of the district. These six individuals have been heavily involved both in school district issues during a time of diminishing resources and in the community as well, at what was oftentimes great personal sacrifice.

Kay Cole is the mother of two children, both in the public schools. A self described “participant,” she has been involved in the schools as an active mother for eleven years. She has held a variety of responsibilities including fund raising and elective office both at the building and city wide level. She first became involved as a fund raiser because she “was asked.” She increased her involvement when supported and encouraged by two of the authors of the Millville parent involvement policy and assisted by the district’s staff member in charge of parental involvement. She continues to be involved not only for the sake of her children, but because she has found working with and meeting other adults who share her passion for quality schools an invigorating and rewarding experience. She has watched herself grow and change as a member of the parent involvement movement. Mrs. Cole is married and maintains full time employment inside the home as a child care provider. She possesses a high school diploma, is of Polish extraction, and lives in a working class ward with a mixture of apartments, multifamily dwellings and single family homes as well as small businesses.
Eduardo Rodriguez is the father of three sons. He is married, a college graduate, has course work beyond the Bachelor's degree and has been employed his entire adult life in human service and advocacy positions. His involvement with the schools spans more than two decades. His early years of contact were as candidate for school committee from a ward largely made up of elderly white voters and a smattering of recent Latino arrivals, but represented by a long time Millville resident of French Canadian descent. In his first run for school committee while still a college student, he placed his name on the ballot in an effort to raise issues which he did not believe were being addressed by the schools for its rapidly changing minority population. As an Ecuadorian immigrant, he saw the curriculum as irrelevant to many Latino and African American youth, and remembered his struggle with the tracking system in high school when he attended the Millville Public Schools. In his second bid for school committee, he ran as one of three candidates from the most affluent ward in the city and believes he was defeated based on his race. He continues to be involved as an advocate for other Latinos, and as a parent advocate. Mr. Rodriguez brings with him a considerable amount of experience in community organizing, voter registration, and political action. He has held office at the building and city wide level, and has participated in numerous community task forces. Though sometimes referred to as controversial, he is sought after by members of both the Latino and Anglo communities for his counsel and perspective on education and human service issues. In response to the question about his activities, Mr. Rodriguez
described himself as an activist, rather than as a participant or leader.

Kate Lee is married and the mother of two children who have graduated from the public schools. A graduate of Millville High School and a life long resident of the community, she maintains full time employment in addition to her community and political activities. Her ethnic heritage is French Canadian. Although the younger of her children graduated from high school last year, Mrs. Lee continues to attend school committee meetings, be involved in school related political activities, and maintain a high degree of interest in the public schools. She was one of the authors of a parent involvement policy adopted by the school committee, and has attended numerous state and national conferences on parent involvement. She resides in a ward consisting of commercial and residential properties, including some of the largest dwellings in the community, multifamily, and single family homes.

María Sanchez is the mother of three children and five step children. She has been involved with the schools for fifteen years, before she had children of her own. Her three children and three of her step children attend the public schools, and two have graduated from high school and married. Two of her children recently exited the bilingual program. A self described participant and activist, she has held a variety of elective offices in the schools from president to representative. She has been involved both in the city wide PAC and the bilingual PAC, and as a member of the former is one of the plaintiffs in a suit against the city for violation of the desegregation consent decree. She is a local high school graduate, is married and
works full time outside the home as a community service provider. Her residence is in the heart of the Latino community.

Beth Coffey is the mother of four children, all of whom attend public school. After much personal anguish, she placed her two older sons in private secondary school last year because she was no longer satisfied with class size and local commitment. Her family has since relocated within the state of Massachusetts, largely because she wanted all her children to attend public school and no longer felt satisfied with the schools in Millville. She herself attended parochial school in another state as a child. Of German extraction, she is married, attends graduate school at a public higher education institution on a part time basis, and is currently doing an internship for administrative certification. Ms. Coffey is one of the original authors and crafters of the parent involvement policy for the district. She has held a variety of elective offices including president of the city wide parent group, has served on numerous task forces and interview committees, has attended and presented at national conferences on parent involvement in education, and has been recognized by members of the community for her outstanding advocacy on behalf of children. Until recently, she resided in the most affluent ward of the city, but has moved away in order for her children to receive the kind of public education she believes they deserve.

Daniel Erklauer is the father of two children in the public schools. He has been involved since before his daughter went to kindergarten, as one of the original authors of the parent involvement policy for the district. He has held top elective office both
at the building and district wide level, has served on numerous interview committees and district and community task forces, and has provided written and oral testimony on behalf of equal, quality education before the Massachusetts Board of Education, the Massachusetts Legislature and its subcommittees, and before the United States House of Representatives. Mr. Erklauer has attended numerous state and national conferences on parent involvement in education, and has contributed articles to newspapers and journals on the subject. He is married, maintains full time employment, and is extremely involved in union, political and community activities. He lives in a working class ward of small apartment buildings, multifamily and single family homes, and small businesses. Mr. Erklauer has attended graduate school and is enrolled in a doctoral program.

The interviewees were guided through a series of questions, focusing on five general areas:

- their involvement in the schools;
- how they became involved;
- the changes they’ve seen in the schools since the passage of Proposition 2 1/2;
- how their involvement has changed because of the passage of Proposition 2 1/2;
- what they perceive to be future implications for parent involvement activities in the next decade.

After the interviews were concluded and the transcripts were reviewed, numerous common threads emerged which have provided me with a range of areas to focus on for the study.
Collection and Management of Data

The participants were interviewed for approximately two hours each in an interruption-free environment. The interviews were taped using a Sony micro-cassette tape recorder. After the interviews were complete they were transcribed on a Macintosh computer using the Microsoft Word 4.0 program. Hard copies were printed from the transcription, and were further used in analyzing the responses obtained through this qualitative analysis. In addition, each of the participants was provided with a copy of his remarks for review and further clarification. They were asked not to share their remarks with anyone until they had a chance to review them and make comments in the margin or on additional paper so that their remarks would not become biased by the interjection of anyone else's perceptions. A final copy of their interview would be available for each participant. Copies of all the transcripts were to be provided to another parent, David Scanlin, who triangulated the data with me. As an involved parent himself, Mr. Scanlin provided me with an opportunity to share the data and conclusions in a way that ensures integrity and non-bias on my part.

While the participants were reviewing the transcripts, I reviewed them for common threads and for areas not previously covered in the interviews which would shed more light on their involvement.
During the interviews minimal notes were taken in order not to distract the participants. Notes were limited to jotting down key words which were of significance in probing further with the respondents, or to review their interview with those key words in mind.

Following the computer entry of all the interviews, each interview was labeled in its own document within the “interviews” folder on the hard drive. The data was broken down and organized on the hard drive, on computer print outs, on index cards, and in legal pads. Areas of organization included:

- linking all of the responses to a particular question into a single document;
- references to a single incident in a separate document;
- retrieving words, feelings or phrases which were similar and which were made by more that one respondent into a single document;
- sorting out common threads.

Print-outs of categories were available as needed.

Based on the six specific research questions, common threads appeared to emerge as the transcripts were read and re-read. I have used these themes in the development of case studies for Chapter IV.

**Analysis of Data**

Transcripts from the six interviews were reviewed as they became available, and compared to the audio tape for accuracy. Transcripts were then read together in their entirety. The transcripts
were reviewed frequently to allow the researcher to become totally familiar with the responses.

The interviews were then separated by question, reviewed one question at a time, and compared to that of the other respondents for common threads and conclusions. Notes were taken to assist the researcher in compiling the data. Color coding, tags, as well as cut and paste techniques on the computer were utilized to organize and analyze the data.

Conclusion

This qualitative case study of the reflections of six parents on what impact politics and state financing for education has had on parent involvement in an urban setting will contribute to the literature on parent involvement. The study provides a concrete, contemporary approach to the complex issues faced by parents on a regular basis when they find that events around them become a catalyst causing them to act in a pro-active way to impact the delivery of education in the community in which they live.

It cannot be ignored, nor should it be, that the influence of their activities has a significant impact on equal educational opportunities for minority children, and Puerto Rican children in particular. The most disenfranchised voting block in the community, Puerto Ricans have been largely ignored by White politicians and voters. The coalitions that these parents build with community service providers, other minority parents and civic leaders will have long term impact on the kinds of programs and opportunities afforded to children of the
community as their right. What these parents have done through their activities goes far beyond their own children. Their commitment and struggles to raise their children in a pluralistic society is a model for other parents and educators to study.

A review of the literature on parent involvement, on taxation and state financing in Massachusetts, and on activities in which these particular parents have been involved provides a framework from which to analyze the qualitative research and to make deductions about the subject. With a focus on minority parent involvement, with an eye toward determining what the impact of tax initiatives has been on older, poorer communities in particular, and through a process of pentimento, layer upon layer of politics, of decision making, of advocacy, will be peeled away to expose the true impact of the work of a movement of courageous parents on a poor, urban community.

In the next chapter I will develop case studies for each of the six parents. Their own words will be used often to describe the political events which they engaged in to influence decisions made by the school district of Millville.
CHAPTER IV
CASE STUDIES

Introduction

The qualitative approach to research was used in this study in order to capture the voices, the passions, the involvement of a movement of parents in public education. They were encouraged to speak freely and to reflect upon the impact of their contributions to a struggling urban school district. What readers will come to know, that perhaps the participants themselves do not even realize, is the difference that these parents made in the community. With great emotion, often with tears, they recounted their activities, their commitment, their love and loyalty to the schools, their children, and the children of the community.

The parents in the case studies represent a variety of ethnic, socioeconomic, educational and linguistic groups as well as both sexes. Some have been born and raised in the community, one is an immigrant. Their ages are fairly close in range, around the forty mark, with two of the women in their thirties. They live in areas of the community ranging from the most struggling neighborhood to the most affluent. What these parents have in common is their commitment to public schools and equal educational opportunity.

The parents also share great determination and idealism. Their involvement is a patchwork of events which can be pieced together as a quilt which protects and enhances the lives of the children in Millville.
The case studies begin with a brief description of each parent, including educational experience, socioeconomic background, ethnicity, family circumstances and age. Also included are the impressions of the researcher of the individual. Their own voices follow, placed in eight categories which emerged as themes during the interviews.

I listened to the interview tapes twice, and read the transcripts of their interviews a half dozen times or more in order to determine the themes. I then gave the transcriptions of the case studies to David Scanlin, the triangulator, for review and corroboration of my analysis the material. When Mr. Scanlin indicated that the message was accurate, the case study was complete.

Themes that emerged provided me with an outline within which to place the comments made by the parents in the case studies. Their words are not necessarily, therefore, reprinted in the order in which they said them.

Profiles

Kay Cole

Kay Cole is in her early forties. She is a very well liked, very amiable women in whom many people have placed their trust. She makes you feel good just to be around her. Kay will never ask you to do something she wouldn’t do herself. She can be counted on to keep a confidence and to be diplomatic in her dealings with parents, administrators, and members of the school committee. Uneasy with her leadership role, she claims to be unprepared for the challenge,
though she is articulate, organized, and thorough in her approach. An abundance of warmth and sincerity follows Kay in all her ventures. One of her greatest strengths is her ability to be inclusive and to recruit all kinds of people to participate in parent activities, whether she agrees with them or not. She is able to see and appreciate different sides of an issue, though firm in her own resolve once she makes up her mind.

Kay's heritage is Polish. She was born and raised in Springfield, the second of four daughters in a working class family. As a child she had polio. When she was fourteen she started dating the man she eventually married just prior to her high school graduation. They have been married for twenty five years, own their own two-family home in a working class neighborhood, and have two children, a daughter in the public high school and a son in middle school.

Involved in parent activities since her daughter went to kindergarten, she has participated as a fund raiser, PTO member, PAC president, and twice as president of the city wide parent organization. Many times Kay has remarked that she continues her involvement to stimulate her mind and to be with other adults. When her own children entered school she cared for pre-school children in her home during the work day while keeping an eye on her mother-in-law who lived downstairs. Since the elder Cole has entered a nursing home, Kay has used the first floor of their two family home for her child care responsibilities. On days when school is dismissed early or when it is not in session her charges may swell from four in number to as many as twelve. She laughs when telephoned on such occasions and laments with her dry sense of humor that she won't
make it through the day. Kay always does, and manages to maintain a remarkably even disposition and sense of dignity under the most stressful circumstances.

Despite the mantle of leadership placed on her shoulders, Kay has resisted identifying herself as a leader. She believes that she is a participant and not a spokesperson, which is hardly true. She does not accept praise or accolades well and is quick to deflect the recognition to others who have followed her lead.

When Kay first became involved she was timid and nervous. She was unsure of process and procedure, but her excellent people skills allowed her to overcome some very difficult moments. Kay frequently speaks about the first time she had to conduct a heated meeting at which the PAC and the superintendent were at odds. Parents had done their research, had the facts, and were armed with information as ammunition. Following her lead, parents presented their case in a calm manner. She said that she could not believe that she was disagreeing with the superintendent in public, and surprised that he came around to the parents’ way of thinking. Her excellent people skills ensured that everyone was able to disagree without being disagreeable.

Kay’s greatest strength lies in her ability to make everyone feel welcome and appreciated and in her ability to network and recruit new parents. She is genuine and generous in her compliments of her fellow parents and their contributions.

Interviewee’s Comments. “I originally got involved when my daughter was in first grade at the Powell Avenue School and there was not an organized parent involvement policy in Millville and a
couple of women that I didn’t know - it was my daughter’s first year in school - got up and said that we need so and so and so and so and so have decided to be co-presidents and someone else is going to be a treasurer and someone else is going to be a secretary and we do need some people for fundraising, so if you’re interested in helping let us know. I was very nervous and it seemed that everyone knew everyone else and I didn’t feel very comfortable joining in, but I did go after the meeting and say my name is ... and my phone number is ... If you’d like to call me - if you need me I’ll be glad to help. But nobody really seemed to need me. They seemed to have everything under control. And into November of that year I got a phone call. The woman who had agreed to do the fundraising had decided she couldn’t do it and could I please take over. So I originally got involved helping to raise funds for the elementary school.

... I got more involved in more governance issues and things when the parent involvement policy in the Millville Public Schools came into effect and Beth [Coffey] and Kate [Lee] recruited me and said “we need you. You obviously have some leadership abilities. You follow through on things and you did a great job fundraising but there’s other areas we need you to be part of it.” I was hesitant, but they were very supportive and assured me that they would be there if I needed help and they were.

And I can remember how I was that first September of 1982 when I was so anxious to help and nobody needed me and I came out of that meeting thinking that I wanted to do something and nobody needed me and I wasn’t good enough to be part of it, that there was a clique and it was a terrible feeling. Because I had something to offer
however small it might be and nobody seemed to need me. So it's got to be very difficult for somebody who doesn't have a lot of self confidence or knowledge or doesn't have the language to come in and be part of it.

The most important part of parent involvement is communicating. Communicating with the school committee, with the local politicians, that you're watching them, that you know what they're doing. Letting them know when you're happy about something they've done. But also letting them know when you're unhappy about a vote or stand that they've taken. Communicating with the parents. Realizing as a parent that goes to a lot of meetings that that isn't the most important thing. Just having that networking that you can get people motivated and activated when issues come up - that's important. Having that network. I guess those are the most important ways.

I think it’s important that my children know that education is important to me. I think it’s important that I know what’s going on in the schools and as a side I do it also to have contact with peers of mine.

I realized ... there were a lot of people who were not committed to the schools - who were only concerned what was happening with their child. I really believe in public schools. I think it’s important that my children know that everyone’s not White middle class - that the world is made up of all kinds of different people.

The [overrides] impacted on my children first of all, but the whole perception of the schools in the city. Sometimes you feel like
you almost have to apologize. I don’t. I tell people why my children are in the public schools. Sometimes people are almost accusing when they ask why your children are in the public schools. Like you’re being abusive to them and they’re wonderful schools. And the opportunities have been wonderful and not everyone takes advantage of them. That’s nothing I can control or anyone else can control, but someone very wise once said to me it’s having equal opportunities - and those weren’t there any more. Those weren’t there - the opportunities to take advantage of.

What made me move away from those issues of fundraising when I became president at Powell Avenue was seeing that the previous president was very organized and held people accountable. I realized that it was OK to ask questions and we could agree to disagree and I had the right to ask them for my child. That was the year that the portable classrooms became an issue at Powell Avenue School and I realized that people don’t always tell you the truth and unless you keep on top of things you … you have to be willing to fight. And I’ve always looked at it as a wrestling match or boxing match where you had to just keep coming back and you couldn’t give up. They would win then. They being the city, central administration or whoever. And I realized that money was tight at that point but we had a right to ask for decent, safe space for our children to learn in. And when a suggestion was made by someone at one point that our kids wouldn’t be there I became more concerned because all these kids were in school together and no child should be in a basement with mold and termites and dark and … it’s hard for them and they shouldn’t be there. Never mind just my child. I realized at that point
I was not in it for just my child. I was concerned about education in this city.

I was scared to death. I'm not afraid anymore. I've learned that it's OK to disagree. It's OK to disagree as an adult when you do it rationally and sensibly, and don't resort to being rude and arrogant and that you know your facts, and you can argue and you can be successful in winning your points if you've researched it and know what you're talking about and have the answers and the come backs.

I know that I was not as politically aware from 1981 to about 1986. ... I think I've become politically aware of what decisions are made at city hall or at the state level or the federal level and how they impact on my child. And the programs that are available for them, the pupil teacher ratio in that school, whether there are things as basic as music and art and physical education. That's why I stayed involved.

But I got into it in fundraising. Just to be part of the school and to know what was happening. That's how I got started. ... Because there was not the money in the budget for enrichment. I mean, library books - I can remember going to my first school committee meeting and going up the stairs and sitting there. As I said, I was not very politically aware. And people talking about addendums to ... and I didn't even know what an addendum was. I think I had been so focused on little children and in my home that I had not done a lot of thinking.

Library books were cut and the Powell Avenue School PAC was raising money to buy library books. I remember a woman standing
up saying that this is ridiculous, we shouldn't be raising money for books. This is a right. That's something that should be in every school and enough provided so that every classroom has enough to use so that they can learn. So that was the beginning of my being socially aware and politically aware.

... We had a mayor who was chair of the school committee which I think is a real conflict of interest. ... There was always a priority for public safety in appropriations - police, fire, DPW [Department of Public Works]. Not that those aren't important, but education is at least equally important. So when the budget had to get cut, books were the first thing that got cut. Books went before teachers and crayons went before teachers and that was our first fight for the school. This was ridiculous. In September we shouldn't have to be buying pencils and crayons and books for our children. They should be budgeted items. We should be raising money for enrichment type of things. For puppet shows, for ice cream sundaes, storytellers, field trips, those type of enrichment things, not to buy what should be basics in an elementary school.

I've been part of letter writing campaigns to furnish school building assistance when the school additions were in jeopardy. I certainly support and continue to support candidates who are at least open minded about things and don't seem to come with an agenda of their own. I support [candidates] by collecting signatures for them, by holding signs. Nobody wants me to hold their signs for them ever again [because all her candidates lose]. They want me to hold it for their opponent. I support candidates financially to a small degree, or
by just talking about them to friends and relatives and neighbors who have perhaps different ideas.

I think politically the state aid that came back to this community was not earmarked for education, although my understanding is that most of it comes back based on an educational formula and for years I think we’ve had politicians who have been able to keep our property taxes very low ... by not always spending all of the money earmarked for education by using some of that money for police, fire, DPW so not needing to raise as much local property tax. Politically that was very good for them; they were able to be reelected year after year after year because they kept taxes low. When [the Mayor] came out with the first override which was nine million dollars or something it happened at a time where my husband had changed jobs. Other family circumstances had changed. Our living expenses doubled so another fifty or sixty dollars a month would have been a lot for us. But I felt it [the override] was important because not having services was worse.

... If the first override had passed we would have had a fully funded library, police, fire, DPW and a school department funded and it would have cost us just a little more than we passed in individual menu overrides. It’s the first year I’ve had to say to people that I know that my children didn’t have the opportunities in the Millville Public Schools due to budget cuts and people just don’t have a vested interest for the most part in our schools in this community. They’ve chosen to take their children into private and parochial schools, for whatever reasons, whether they’re because they didn’t want their children exposed to minorities or because they felt there
wasn’t enough discipline or for whatever reasons, but I think that
was a copout because if they had kept their children in the public
schools, these are the people who are educated and vocal and these
are the people who would have gone to politicians and school
committee meetings and demanded that there be books and crayons
and pencils in their schools and it would have cost them less in
money because the small amount of taxes they would have paid
would have been less that the private school or parochial school
tuition they would have paid. But these are the people that would
have been vocal and would have demanded excellence. And things
would not have gotten to the point they got to.

I became involved [in McDuffy v. Robertson] because at the time
I was President of the city wide organization and it seemed like a
logical choice. But it is important because I do understand the lack of
tax base in Millville, why Millville couldn’t possibly begin to
adequately fund the public schools - although they certainly could do
a lot better than they do now. So I agree that there should be some
base - I mean a standard by which every child has at least the same
opportunities, the same financial base to start with. That isn’t there
right now. And there’s no way that a community like Millville could
fund publicly the same types of schools that a wealthier community
could. So there has to be a better way for the state to help
communities like Millville. However, I feel that it’s very important
that if that happens that any sort of local support isn’t taken away
either. And I don’t think it should be where suddenly the state is
paying everything. That’s a real concern of mine.
My understanding is that in their native countries, Latino parents are very politically active and do vote. However, it comes back down to not always being made to feel that you're part of the process. And I think that a lot of these parents don't vote, don't understand the system here. Culturally we're different. And again, just from networking and talking to other parents, I know that in Latino cultures parents send their children to school and parents don't have as much contact with the school, but they support the school. But they are not necessarily involved in questioning of the school. So I think a lot of parents of children in the public schools are not necessarily registered voters, and don't always understand the issues, so they're not the voting block that they could be.

The portable classrooms at Powell Avenue School, being involved in a homework policy, being part of the school that advocated for a health curriculum - being part of that PAC where someone came forward and said there should be some formal health education in the city ... these were important to other children besides my own.

When there was a concern about how emergency aid was being spent, we [parents] called in the state and they did come in and question some of the expenditures. Concerns about when parents are being asked for what should be offered in the schools - some parents who could afford it were being asked to pay for things and other parents who couldn't. And we felt that that couldn't happen - it made a division of parents - the have and the have-nots.
Millville is aging as far as the tax base is going. A lot of the homeowners are now getting close to retirement age and don’t feel any ownership in the schools. Other people have their children in parochial or private schools and don’t feel any ownership in the schools. But I think they have to be reminded that it’s a moral obligation to provide an education for the children in this community. Whether they’re Black or Brown, Yellow or White. Those opportunities were there for them and their parents and they should be there for my children and my children’s children. In this community when money is given to raise the level of school funding, it’s often taken away from local appropriations because [politicians believe that] you don’t need that much money for the schools. They think we need more police and firemen and those kinds of things. So that’s a concern. I read in the paper tonight that we might get almost $7 seven million of aid. And my concern is that it be earmarked for education along with the EEOG money. However, local appropriations or cherry sheet money is not earmarked for education. So if our budget is twenty-four million and we have twelve million now from the state through EEOG money or this education money that was just passed - will we now get only twelve million from cherry sheet money instead of seventeen or eighteen million? Are they going to take it away at that end and say that you have a level funded budget? And yes we will, but that wasn’t the reason for passing $186 million. The reason for passing $186 million was to try to bring communities back up to the level they were at a few years ago when there were educational reform funds coming in.
I remember being at a meeting, and one of our school committee people stood there and said that in a few years there would be no need for any child to sell candy bars, or raffle tickets or gift wrapping and he looked forward to that day. And as a parent and a person who has done fundraising, I look forward to that day. As a homeowner or a person on the street I look forward to not having to buy any more gift wrap or candy bars. But that money has dried up. And kids if anything are having to sell more just to do the same types of things. There were wonderful things done in the schools through School Improvement Council money. There were homework tutoring programs after school, basket weaving, calligraphy, indoor soccer, all types of wonderful things that don’t happen anymore. There were also lots of community things like swimming pools that weren’t there for a while and other opportunities. Summer camps, parks, the kids who used to work at the parks during the summer and organize games and field trips for kids in the summer … those aren’t there anymore. So if anything, the schools should be providing more things for kids and not be providing less.

I think this last round of White flight was due more to perception. I think it was due to political fighting among school committee people, political fighting among aldermen and school committee people, political fighting among a mayor who we have now who stood up two years ago and said we had lots of money in the school department. We didn’t need any more. We didn’t need any money, we had enough. And because he was a business man, of an older generation than the previous mayor, the people on the street thought he was telling the truth. He’s been proven wrong, but it
didn’t help. So I think the perception of not having the programs and the pupil-teacher ratio, and even teachers shooting themselves in the foot by being out there saying to people that they know that there is a lot of waste have ended up hurting the kids. So I think the first round of this community pulling away from the schools was due to racism.

I continue to be involved because how can I sit back and do nothing? At least I can say to myself “I tried.” I supported the teachers, I supported the principals, I supported quality education in this community. I supported who I think were candidates for school committee who cared about quality education for all kids; who didn’t come, for the most part, with hidden agendas, who felt that education was a way out of poverty for a lot of these kids. That’s why I stayed involved. I think why you grow and change, the more you learn, the angrier you get. That a politician could do this to your kids, just to benefit themselves.

One of the issues I feel is very important is that of parents being involved in the selection of principals and administrators. For a few years we’ve been part of that interview team. We’re very aware that we have input into. We’re very aware that we don’t have the right to make the recommendation, and we don’t have the right to vote on that recommendation. But that’s not what we’re asking for. We’re asking to be able to ask intelligent, pertinent questions to somebody whose hiring will have a direct impact in my children’s life for a few years. Because by having my children in a few different schools, I know how important a principal is to a school, just to the whole
climate of what happens in that school, be it curriculum, or discipline, or anything that happens in that school is directly impacted by who the principal is, whether they are a strong principal or a weak principal or whether they end up causing chaos by simply the type of people they are. So I think parents have a vested interest in wanting to be part of that - and we have been in the past. This new school committee and mayor - although we have talked with the mayor and he seems to been privately a little more open minded... However, this new school committee and their personnel subcommittee are adamant about not wanting us involved. For the wrong reasons.

I don't think they want to share any power. But we don't want any power from them. I think we are a powerful enough group on our own and can get people motivated and involved. So it's very difficult when we've researched and found how other communities have done things to stand there and ask to discuss it and be told that our letter was brought up in public discussion and nobody wanted to talk about it and it was tabled. And then only to go on further in the meeting and have them discuss it at a time when parents could not have any input into the discussion. So it's frustrating.

We have had some discussions with the interim superintendent and a couple of members of the school committee and we're going to try and come up with a plan, a way of doing it that parents can be involved and have input into decision making - that will be palatable to both sides. So we just keep - hopefully we'll end up with the same thing but have to go and do the same thing we've done over and over again. And no matter how we've tried to tell some of these people that
all this school reform and everything you talk about calls for more parent involvement - not less and less and less and less. But more and more and more. You know there are all kinds of parent involvement. Because there aren’t 200 people in the school committee meeting does not mean that there are not parents involved. And yes the parents’ first place should be at home helping the child with homework and making sure they have a good night’s sleep and a good meal in the morning and they’re healthy and feel secure, but there’s a role for all parents and for those parents who want a role in governance and having input into things there should be a place for those parents too.”

Beth Coffey

Beth is forty two years of age. She has been involved in a number of community service organizations and once received the Citizen of the Year Award from the local council of National Council of Christians and Jews.

Beth grew up on Long Island, attended parochial schools, and was among the first women to attend Boston College. Her decision to attend Boston College was solidified when her guidance counselor at her all girl high school told her that Boston College was not a good choice because of the number of boys in attendance. Many of Beth’s decisions are “in spite of.” Beth is currently completing an internship for administrative certification. It is her hope that she can involve parents in a meaningful way in a school where she becomes the educational leader.
It was at Boston College that Beth met her husband. She married him the summer after graduation, and worked as a teacher in the Boston Public Schools while her husband attended law school. When he began to practice law in Millville, the city of his birth, the couple relocated and Beth continued her teaching career in the Millville Public Schools. The birth of their first son moved Beth into a state of "retirement," and she stayed at home with her four sons as they have grown. Driving the boys to ski lessons, soccer practice, piano lessons and CCD classes was accomplished on top of a very heavy community service load. Beth's volunteer activities grew to the point where she once joked that she would have to return to work to get some peace.

In 1985 she attended a parent involvement conference with some other parents from Millville, including Kate Lee. The two became energized and convinced the superintendent of schools that it was possible for parents to write a policy which would increase parental involvement. The community was ripe for such a move. The superintendent, long an advocate of parent involvement, was anxious for a ready pool of allies and realistic enough to know that there might be times when their interests would conflict. Through Beth and Kate's leadership the dream of parents organizing across the city became a reality. In September of that year the school committee approved a parent involvement policy.

Beth was elected the first president of the city wide organization. A minimum of once a day and oftentimes at night and on weekends, she contacted the staff member assigned to assist parents and gave suggestions, nudges, and marching orders. Beth is highly
organized, very creative, and has a tremendous capacity for seeing the big picture. She never stops. Her commitment and passion are beyond reason. When she takes on a project it becomes all consuming.

Her leadership within the Millville Schools gained her recognition and the mayor asked her to head up his campaign for an override for the schools. The campaign was not successful, but certainly not for lack of effort. The odds were overwhelmingly against the public schools. The local media fed the resentment toward minorities, “liberal” programs and bilingual education. The community turned its back on its schools. In the process, Beth received hate mail and threatening phone calls. She felt disenfranchised. The community she had once worked so hard to be a part of, to contribute to, was a community she no longer knew. Frustrated, betrayed and angered, she placed the family home on the market, found another school district where she felt her children would receive a proper public school education, and moved to an affluent neighborhood more than 200 miles away. She continues to worry about the future for public education in the Commonwealth and in the nation. Normally an upbeat and positive participant, her interview is riddled with the anguish and frustrations of unsuccessful political campaigns. There is a genuine lack of hope in her responses.

Interviewees Comments. “I knew of Kate’s [Lee’s] involvement with the Central PTO, and the whole bus issue .... She had some good ideas, and she had done a lot of things with the Central PTO, but “A,” it [the Central PTO] was crisis oriented, and “B,” it wasn’t the
same in every school, and I felt that that was one of its absolute weak links, because if you weren’t the same from school to school in the district, it wasn’t going to work, and “C,” it was the same people all the time. The same person would be PTO president for ten years, or the entire time their kid was in that school and if you didn’t like that person, then you probably weren’t going to work with her, and it was probably just going to be her buddies and her friends who worked with her. And I thought that there was a base we could go from, and that there had been successes, but that there was room to grow.

I think that’s [involvement] the most effective way to help my children. I didn’t start out that way. I started out in the traditional ways ... helping at bake sales, doing book sales, getting performers to come ... those kinds of things that, even though I think those kinds of things are important, and there’s a role for some people in those areas, I was frustrated because there were difficulties in achieving what I wanted to do there, and I just felt I could have more clout or have a better effect if I was doing governance issues. I think frustration more than anything led me to the governance issues. How I really got started was when my son was in kindergarten and I was at Kramer Lane School and Mrs. Kelly was the principal, and we wanted to do something or other, and the PAC had raised all this money, and her name was on the account, and we had to get everything approved by her and if she didn’t want it to happen, it didn’t happen. And we as parents felt that we had put all our efforts into it, and that it was our money to spend and with her approval and input, we weren’t shutting her off, but we felt that we had as much
right to say how this money was to be spent as she did. So that was aggravating and frustrating and I was busy with other things at the time, so I wasn’t going to let it bother me, but it did start to bother me because it was affecting my kid, and actually, stepping back a little bit, we weren’t involved in curricular issues at that point. We had no say in the budget at that particular school -- this was ten years ago -- we had no say in any of the programs, how the place was run, even special events. We were basically at the beck and call of the principal. She wanted something, she called us up, asked us to fund raise, and to do it. And that’s all well and good, but that wasn’t what I had in mind, and I thought there were broader roles for us, and they weren’t available at that point, so that’s when we began to think of taking matters into our own hands.

I think Mrs. Kelly was fairly traditional at the time, as far as principals go. I think she just assumed it was part of her job to oversee those funds and to say how everything was to happen in her school, and that parents were kind of nice to have around, to pat on the head, and bring out for the Mother’s Day Tea, but we weren’t welcomed into classrooms or asked about curricular decisions or asked for different directions about where the school was going. That wasn’t our role, and she didn’t see it that way for us.

...There’s an awful lot of parents who are very comfortable at this level and don’t want to move on, they’re just very happy to do bake sales, and book sales, and be room mother. And maybe in an idyllic school situation with no other problems going on, that’s OK, you can get by with that, and it’s no big deal, and life goes on. But when you’re in a situation where there are so many needs, and they
aren’t being met, I think there was a certain group of parents there who said we need to do something about this, or get together with other parents, because we weren’t getting what we needed.

...The other problem I had with this particular principal was if she liked you, she confided in you and included you. If she didn’t like you, she didn’t. And it wasn’t that she didn’t like me, but I wasn’t one of her pets that she included in things. I just thought that all parents should have a voice. There were a lot of parents being excluded, and that bothered me.

And I guess the next thing that happened ... was that Parent Conference in Worcester [in 1984]. That must have been the next step. ... I sat in workshop after workshop and said “we can do that.” All those things that I was hearing about that other school systems were doing, I thought to myself, we can do that. Parents having a voice, parents being listened to, parents being advocates, the things that Cambridge was doing at the time in terms of schools of choice, and magnet schools, and I thought to myself, we have an ideal situation! We had an administration that was willing to listen to parents. ...

And I felt that there were some teachers who might be willing to work with us, though I always thought the principals were the weak link in the chain, which is why I think I am where I am now at this point in my life, which is working toward principal’s certification. I was energized, and excited about the possibilities. And I didn’t know Kate at that time either. My husband had been friends with her husband in high school, and I think I had been introduced to her once or twice .... So we got talking, and we were both energized. Why couldn’t we do that here? And when we talked about it, Kate and I
were sort of on the same wave length. She had a lot more experience at this because her kids were older and she had been involved for a long, long time. She had been involved in that whole Lakeville mess, and the bus issue, and the whole shebang. But I had a whole different perspective having been in the classroom as a teacher that she didn’t have. I taught 5 1/2 years, in 3 different schools in Boston, and then 2 1/2 years in Millville at two different grade levels. So I had had a wide range of experiences. I had also done some parent involvement things as a teacher that I was sort of ostracized for. That teachers in the buildings where I worked felt -- some of them -- felt threatened with. When I was in Boston I used to do home visits. I was working in housing projects, D Street Housing Project in South Boston, the Dudley Street Housing Project in Roxbury ... and I'd go visit these kids in their homes. These were inner city, poor kids. In Roxbury they were all Black, in South Boston they were White or Cambodian and Vietnamese. This was 1972. I went to their homes ... I didn’t go to everybody’s home. If there was a kid who was goofing off, and who had some potential or was not coming to school, or if there was something that I thought I could communicate to the parent that would help this kid succeed in school that it was worth a shot. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn’t. But I always thought it was an important thing to do.

... I wanted my kids to get the best education they could. And not only my own kids, but the other kids in the community. I really felt myself to be a part of this community. I no longer do feel that way, but I did then I felt very strongly that I was a member of this community and that was one way I could contribute. That I knew a lot about
education and that in an advocacy role I could convince people of its importance and its value to the community and if we had a wonderful public education system Millville would attract new residents. But obviously I was not as convincing as I would have liked to have been.

My reasons for involvement have changed. I think times have evolved. School based management was unheard of when we were beginning. Principals didn’t feel that they had to have a role for parents or that parents had anything to offer. So I think the times themselves have created part of the change.

The other part of the puzzle is I think that one of the wonderful things that I see in parent involvement is that once you get a taste of it and you see all the possibilities, it’s real hard to go back to those book sales and bake sales. That you are empowered - you become empowered. The more you learn about public education and how it works the more successes you have. It sort of pushes you to keep on going and to expand your horizons and to bring more parents aboard. I think it works for your own kid individually and I think it works for kids in general. I think when the city wide organization originated we were going full steam in the first couple of years before the community kind of turned its back on us and turned its back on public education. I think we were doing great things. I think there were lots of parents who were involved - a lot of those parents we’ve lost - they’re gone. All that talent has gone.

[Politics] has absolutely influenced me. First, having been president of the city wide group, and realizing that yes, there were
lots of great things that we could achieve as a group, and that administration was supportive of us, but it dawned on me that lots of the things we wanted to do, and the budgetary issues were problematic, in the sense that we weren't getting the community support that we needed, and that is another major decision in why we're moving. I've wheeled children around on petition drives on probably ten or twelve occasions. I can remember when my oldest son was six months old there was a petition asking people to sign saying they were supporting public education. A neighbor asked me to do a couple of streets and I said "sure," because I knew my kids were going to be there some day.

I talked to people door to door, prepared all those position papers that we used with the mayor, wrote letters, I worked or advocated or attended school committee meetings - was often asked to run for school committee, but I don't think my temperament matches electoral office. I always felt I could be more effective on the outside in an advocacy position. But I communicated regularly with school committee people about what I liked, what I didn't like or suggestions or whatever. I worked on curriculum committees, worked on developing [a middle school] with parents and teachers. I really enjoyed all those kinds of things. The frustration came in trying to convince the people in the community to support our efforts. I look back at all the wonderfully creative educational things that occurred in Millville - the creation of the new middle school - I mean that's sort of like a dream come true. It's an ideal situation. And here's a community which is ready to throw it out the window saying we don't want this; it costs too much or is too innovative or there's too
many outside forces - we want more control over what’s going on. I mean it boggles my mind that we - that this community has not supported all the good things that have occurred in the schools that have been brought about by the administration, by individual teachers within individual classrooms.

I don’t think that the technical high school gets enough credit. The new middle school obviously doesn’t. The wonderful additions that the former superintendent was able to pull off on four schools. This community should be on its knees saying “thank you” to this man, and he’s been bad mouthed for years. The fact that graduates of Millville High School get into wonderful, wonderful colleges and have a wonderful academic preparation -- if they are academically motivated.

Politics at the local level [influenced me]. Reading the community and seeing what had to be done. Yeah, we were making great strides internally with the administration and with the schools and with the principals at the city wide level the first couple of years when we started. Internally we were really like an engine humming along, but the outside world - the greater community we were operating in was turning its back on us. And when I realized that or when the city wide organization realized that, we realized we needed to expand our horizons and get the word out - talk about why it was important to support the schools. ... Local politics really did change the focus, and change the kinds of things that parents at the city wide level had to do. I think that’s why a lot of us went to work on the override, or got involved at the state level further along.
... Time, it’s politics, ... the growth process and the empowerment that results once you become an involved parent [changes you]. It’s sort of like there’s no turning back. You grow personally, and as you become empowered, you just keep going along that road, because you know that’s the way you’re going to get the best education for your kid.

My experience was that after I was involved in the overrides that didn’t pass, I realized that there was an element of truth in the fact that there are some members of Millville’s community who cannot afford to have their taxes raised. Not enough to not pass an override. But there is an element of truth. This is a poor community. And I understand that. While the solution is a local solution to a certain degree, in Massachusetts because of the way public education is funded it’s also in very large measure a state solution, and that’s why I sort of abandoned ship in terms of trying to do local things and felt I could be more effective doing things at a state level.

I have a really hard time with the lack of support in this community toward the public schools, and I truly view that mainly as a result of the Hispanic population that has entered the schools.

...It’s the perception in the community that Hispanic children are not of value or valued and therefore we don’t need to support public schools anymore because “our” kids - meaning the White population - are all in the Catholic schools. So we don’t need to support public schools anymore. I’ve always had a real hard time with that. ... So my experience with the presidency of city wide group was that the community was a large part of the picture and that we
needed to address that and that’s why I got involved with the mayor in the first and second overrides. In terms of helping to coordinate the override efforts and getting the word out to the community of why it was important to support the override and how it was going to help public education and that if we didn’t have a good public school system then people would not move into this community. There would be an exodus. And I felt very strongly about that and killed myself working on both of those overrides which were unsuccessful - both of which led to crank phone calls and harassment and loss of friends and neighbor relationships - all of which just come as part of the territory and bothered me, but didn’t bother me because I felt really strongly about what I was doing and the importance of what I was doing.

I was very disillusioned after the second override and sort of withdrew from lots of things and got very frustrated. And I think that’s when I started to focus on the fact that there needed to be some movement on the state level and further along the line started doing some advocacy things with Senator Birmingham and Representative Roosevelt in the educational reform package and attending statewide meetings and writing letters and talking to people on the state board of education. That kind of stuff - hoping it would have some kind of effect although I have very little faith that the educational reform package or an educational reform package will ever get put together that will achieve both ends of providing the kinds of reforms that give quality public education and move us into the 21st century and at the same time equalize the finance and equity issues which I just think
are present in this state. I just don’t see there being a good solution for that in Massachusetts.

Going way back, Kate [Lee] with the bus contract. That was parent advocacy initially. That was my first experience with it. Parents forced the school committee to make budgetary decisions about which company they chose and what would be provided for for their dollar, by advocating for what kinds of things they wanted to see in a bus contract. That was first. Things like advocating to have parent involvement money allocated in the budget, parents advocated for that and were able to achieve it. Things like all day kindergartens, or the additions. I spent hours at public hearings trying to get community people to support the additions. And to a certain degree, curricular things also, although I think there were fewer parents at that level, because fewer parents felt comfortable at that level. I think there was a lot of potential for that to happen, but there were so many other distractions along the way that we kind of lost that focus. But I think we were building toward that. It occurs, but not at the strength level it should. ... and the teen clinic, and the way the school was set up, the new middle school, the way schools changed their focus to interdisciplinary, child centered rather than subject centered like the junior highs. So parents had a great say, I think, in how “X” was spent.

I think my perspective on this whole process has really changed dramatically because of my experiences, because of the times, because of the things I’ve read. I just feel deeply that there is no local
solution to this. That it’s a leadership issue. That we need to make
kids a priority in this country, and they’re not now. And until we do
that, the prospects for successful public education are not good ones.
I just see the gap widening between the haves and the have nots. It’s
getting harder and harder for public education to ever compete with
the kind of education private education can provide. It’s making that
chasm impossible to get across. I think we’re past finding a solution
at the local level. The state level will help us, but it’s a stop gap, a
finger in the dike. I’d love to have an educational reform package,
and I’d love to have a new state finance formula that would help
address the equity issues, but that’s not the long range solution to
public education. It’s more of a leadership issue at the national level,
and somebody has to come along and set the tone and say “kids are
important.” In order for this country to have a successful future is to
lay the framework, lay the foundation, lay the base, and in order to do
that is to provide a quality public education for every kid, and parents
have to take up that call. You have to be involved at the local level and
be involved in grassroots kind of things like voting and advocacy and
talking to school committee. You have to do the statewide thing of
being supportive of education reform packages, and equity in
financing. But you also have an obligation to keep our national
leaders and the congress, the policy makers on target in terms of
quality public education, equitable public education, so that the kind
of education you get in Mississippi is just as good as the kind you get
in New York, or Vermont, or wherever you end up. And if we don’t,
it’s a scary prognosis in terms of the future of the country.
I look at [continuing involvement] from two perspectives. One, I want the best education I can get for my kids. I don’t believe in private schools. I went to Catholic schools from kindergarten to grade 12, and vowed I’d never send my kids to Catholic school. The private schools that I went to, and those that are available to me now, I view as elitist and exclusionary. If I could find a private school that would take kids of all nationalities, all languages, and all economic levels, I would consider sending my kids there if I felt the need to leave public education.

But my bias is that I think that public education in the United States of America should be for everybody. It shouldn’t be just for the poor kids, or the kids who can’t speak English very well, or for the people who can’t afford to do private school or who don’t choose to do private school. It should be of such an exceptional quality that everyone would want to go there. And I think it’s cruel that we have allowed ourselves to get into the situation that we’re in, which is that the poor children go to public schools, and if you can afford to, you send your children to private schools. In most cases, unless you live in a very wealthy community, that’s what happens. It’s a haves and have not situation.

People today view public schools as being mediocre, as being inferior. I think we’re getting to a point where that is really true, because we haven’t funded them properly. And because we haven’t funded them properly and equally so that every kid has a chance to an excellent education. We’ve in essence cooked our own goose. We’ve created this intolerable situation where we’re in such a hole now that it’s really tough to climb out, where it’s really tough for
public education to compete with private education. Before it may not have been a level playing field, but it was sort of close, and more equal choice in terms of the kind of education you were getting. I think that in the vast majority of school systems across the country, and especially in Massachusetts, you can’t say that anymore. You can’t say that of Boston, you can’t say that of Millville, you can’t say that of Lawrence or Lowell.

It’s not just cities. Look at [surrounding communities.] We have friends who moved to [the next town], to get out of Millville, because they wanted to put their kids in public schools. They sent their kids to Catholic schools here, because our schools were “inferior.” They went to [the next town], put them in public schools, and ended up pulling them out of there and putting them in private schools because of all the budget cuts, and overcrowding, and lack of course offerings.

Now if you’re saying that about the [surrounding towns], I think we’ve just created this situation that, even with a won-der-ful education reform package is going to make it impossible to solve this problem, unless some miracle happens.

We’ve created this [problem] by not funding public education adequately at the local, state and national level. You asked me before why I was still at this. “A,” for my kids. “B,” I started out in my own school, and felt some frustration, and got involved at a city/community level, and found that very satisfying and productive, and really felt that we achieved something, and moved, and created something that could be used as a model in other places, and I still firmly believe that. But I think the situation in Massachusetts is so
serious at this point that you can’t be effective at the local level in Millville anymore.

If someone asked me to be president of the city wide next year, I’d tell them “no,” because I think I could be more effective advocating at the state level than I could at the local level. I think there’s nothing I could do at the local level as a parent. I mean, I would still support everything, I would help them philosophically, I would still go to meetings, I would do committees, fundraising, whatever. I wouldn’t abandon ship. Actually, I don’t even think that they can do it at the state level anymore. I agree with Jonathan Kozol, that it has to be a federal situation, for the equity we need to have across the nation has to come from the federal level. And it would be great if we could get it in Massachusetts, and I’d be satisfied with that.

The long range hope I have for my country and my children is that no matter where you went in the United States, if you were in public school, you were getting the best education you could, whether you were Black, White, Brown, Yellow, green, no matter what language you spoke. And you cannot do that now, in any state that I know of, and certainly not across the United States. I’m sort of ambivalent about spending more of my energies at the state level, because I almost think it needs to be a national solution, and I haven’t heard much talk of that from the presidential candidates, and that is very disappointing. I know we have other problems like the deficit, but it’s almost like we’re turning down the volume on the voices of those children who are desperately seeking and who are entitled to a quality public education that they’re not getting, and
have no opportunities of getting, because even if we made a plan today, it would take at least ten years to implement because of the bureaucracy to make it happen, and that’s really frustrating to me.

... [People] have gone to other communities or gone to private education. You get to the point where you get tired of banging your head against the wall. It’s defeat after defeat and trying to have some input into the process and having your words turned around or closed off or the door shut in your face. You get tired of that after a while.

I’m really angry about the state of public education in Massachusetts and across the country. And I’m doing this because I want the best education for my children. But that’s only part of it. When I started out, I wasn’t really doing it for all kids, but I really feel that way now. That’s part of [tears] the reason for parent involvement [more tears] or being involved [strained voice] or caring about parent involvement is just not my own kids ... but ... you’re going to have to give me a minute. [Recorder turned off for several minutes while subject composed herself]. But it’s true, it’s got me to the point where I’m angry about the fact that the kids I knew in Millville, whether the ones I taught as a sub ... or the kids I knew when I used to work in my youngest son’s classroom, it makes me angry that they can’t get the same kind of education that my kids are going to get next year [when we move]. They should have just as much right to sixteen kids in their class, to a drama teacher, to doing three plays a year, to having gym twice a week, to having adequate supplies and materials, to having a library that has adequate
resources and books. It makes me **angry** that that’s not the right of every child in America. It **should** be. Governor Weld is sending his children off to Scruffy Neck, or wherever his kids go, or George Bush talking about how he wants vouchers for private education and parochial schools ... GIVE ME A BREAK! It’s widening the gap between the haves and the have nots. It’s creating a climate in America where there will be no hope for kids. That was always the great American dream, that you could get a good education and **make** something of yourself. And that dream seems closed down [tears] and that’s what really bothers me [tears].

... I’m really disillusioned about the chances of success of holding their [school committee] feet to the fire. I think you do the usual route, the things we’ve done for years. You talk to them informally, you make phone calls, you write letters, you talk to school committee people, you attend school committee meetings, you sit on subcommittees, you communicate how you feel, you present petitions, you hold public hearings, you invite speakers, but I can’t see that working. I really can’t.

This community has closed its eyes and ears to the children who live here. Maybe five years ago that could have worked, but with the current administration, current school committee, current city council, current mayor, they’re going to turn a deaf ear. And that’s why I really feel the sense of frustration and isolation that it’s not going to work. I guess if I were to meet a parent who I had worked with on the city wide organization and they were to ask the question that you just asked, knowing that they weren’t as lucky or fortunate as I am to be able to go elsewhere to find a public education for my
kids that’s going to be a positive experience, my advice to that person would be to concentrate their energies at the state level. I just think they’d have a better chance at this point and time of effecting change at the state level than they would at the local level.

At the same time I would strongly recommend to any Hispanic parent that was involved that that community organization stuff that is so tedious and takes such a long time is very important. You may not have success with that for five years, but the base has to be laid somewhere, and it’s got to occur. That’s not something I can do. Sure, I can be supportive of other people’s efforts, but it has to come from somewhere in the Hispanic community.”

Daniel Erklauer

Daniel Erklauer is in his early forties, the father of two children, a daughter in middle school and a son in fourth grade. He and his wife, a school teacher, live in a working class neighborhood and own their own home. Daniel is currently writing his doctoral dissertation in labor history; “we’re getting too old not to be taken seriously,” he recently remarked. There is hardly anyone who does not take him seriously. He is a driven, highly organized, aggressive man with a background in organizing and labor politics who has little patience for inefficiency and bureaucracy. Not a native to Millville, he was raised in the eastern part of Massachusetts, the son of a woman who was involved in the PTA and a father who was a meat cutter active in union politics. Daniel credits many of his values to his father. He has three sisters and a brother, and was the first in his family to attend college.
He once ran for school committee and was defeated. He has served as president of the city wide parent organization and as president for PACs where his children attended school. At the present time Daniel runs a job retraining program for machinists. He has testified before legislative committees, the city council, the school committee, and United States Congressional hearings on equal educational opportunities for the children of the community. Oftentimes blunt or gruff in his approach, he is highly respected by parents and administrators alike, even when they do not agree with him. Daniel was one of the original parents who wrote the parent involvement policy for the Millville schools.

**Interviewee’s Comments.** “I think the most important thing [for parent involvement] is trying to figure out how to bring parents together across the Anglo and Latino communities. I think the most important thing is for us to identify issues which will allow us to work together and try to build a base. I think that the present group of committee members isn’t going to go away, that financial hard times, though we got a little more money than we anticipated this year, is going to come and go, and what we really need to build is a solid base of people.

In some respects it [parent involvement] came somewhat too easy, and that we were able to get entrée without a lot of fight in most cases, so we didn’t carefully build a base. We don’t have the capacity to call out large numbers of people quickly to respond to situations. We need to build a movement, an educational movement in the city that’s really broad based and I can’t begin to think how we do that. I mean I can, but I can’t in the context of what we’re doing now ... but
I think that’s the most important activity. I think we continue to focus on survival in the sense of not letting them take away any more things than they’ve already taken away. We need to do that too. We could fall into the trap of letting them set an agenda ... the agenda being us trying to hold on to what we have, and then we’re not getting anywhere, we’re on a treadmill and putting in a lot of miles but going nowhere. And that’s where I think where we’re at. And that’s what we have to try to figure out. And I guess in some ways, I guess some of the things they’re going to do they’re going to do. We can’t worry about them. We have to try to figure out what our agenda is. We have to be more militant than we’ve been, because we’re right.

I got a call from two parents who were active in Millville. I had two children who were coming along who weren’t yet in school. I’d been involved in and continued to be involved in labor union politics and in issues concerning the quality of life in the city and people kept trying to push me and kept trying to play on my interests in my children and said, “you really ought to do this,” and “you ought to get in on the ground floor,” and people said a group was meeting over the summer ... to try to put together a parent involvement policy .... The superintendent was really eager to get parents involved in a real substantive way. Not just selling cookies and stuff like that, but actually trying to influence policy and try to involve parents at a level that I thought was really important.

I spent the summer working with 15 - 20 parents, finding as much as we could about parent involvement, how it worked, how it functioned in other school systems across the country. People
gathered all kinds of material. We put our own policy together based some on that, some on Millville's own situation. We took it to the school committee early that fall, and eventually, I think somewhat to our surprise, got them to adopt the policy. From that point on, they accepted the parent involvement policy. I got involved the first year -- one of the people who had embarrassed me to get involved was president of the city wide group, and then she wanted to step back, and the second and third years of the organization I was the president and then the way we structured it, we wanted it not to ever become the possession of any one person, but we really wanted it to be open and as democratic as possible, so we established that someone could only assume a position for a maximum of two years and then they would have that seat open. They could run again, but there had to be intervening time. Which I think made a lot of sense. So then I stepped down, but was still involved, but not as president of the organization.

There was a core [of parents] that was fairly politically active and sophisticated, completely separate from the issue of schools. By that I mean that people were involved in Millville in political campaigns, in desegregation, around housing. People were always involved to one extent or another, around some issue, for the most part. Not everybody, but there was kind of a nucleus. If you look at other things they were involved in, it wasn't just schools. So I think that those people aren't going to be scared off by the bullies that are on the school committee now. People have been bullied before, by bigger bullies than them, and have figured it out [laugh]. These things kind
of swing both ways. I just think that the whole struggle around the budget and the two overrides just really drained people. I think the people, the core of that, were so involved twice in trying to get more money for kids. We were so right in what we were trying to do. And to have come fairly close the first time but to be basically wiped out the second time, it was like a sucker punch to everybody's head and I think it's taken a while for people to figure out how to keep going. It's really been hard for people. They put so much into it. There was so much coalition work with teachers and parents, and a lot of involvement with students and it was just a major amount of work, twice, in a short period of time. People just devoted virtually all their spare time and energy trying to figure out how to do that and you can't do that forever. So a lot of people took a breather and stepped back, but I think this is going to be an interesting year. I think people are going to come back stronger than they've been. I could be wrong, but we'll see.

... [because of politics] I think from a city-wide standpoint we ended spending less time actually working in the buildings, and to really work with what was going on at the actual point where the education was delivered to kids, and a lot more time having to fight on a much bigger front. I think that that's very difficult.

If I look back on all the energy that we've had to expend on all the trips people made to Boston, and all the lobbying of legislators, and all the money that was raised to try to get overrides passed, and all those activities ... if we could have taken all that energy and could have been involved in working with teachers in delivering educational services to kids, the impact would have been
phenomenal. But I think that conditions dictated that, at least on the city wide level, that we spend a lot more time directed away from the actual school house, and a lot more time directed at the State House, at the White House, at wherever. That's what had to be, but I think it drained us.

One of the spillovers, and one of the real negatives, is that people come to parent involvement, and haven’t been involved in other political work or activities, and haven’t been involved in some of the other larger social issues, come to parent involvement initially because their kids have entered school, and they want to be involved with what happens to their kids in the building. And I think what’s happened to the PACs and the city wide parent planning council is that we’re too schizophrenic. We’re trying to influence and work on both levels, but I think the majority of energy has been directed away from ... away from the buildings and away from trying to figure out how to take parents whose point of entry is now “my little kid is now entering kindergarten, how do I get involved?” Because of the historical circumstance, we spend more time whining about what is going on in Boston, than taking that set of new parents and other parents and really trying to figure out how to work with them to keep them involved. I think that a lot of people came to meetings and started getting involved, and all of a sudden people started talking about how we had to go to Boston, and we had to do this, and we had to go raise hell at the school committee meeting. That can be really intimidating for people who have never been involved in anything before, who have no real sense of what the deal is, how the system works, how you do that kind of activity. I think we somehow took it for
granted that people knew all that, because that’s just what we did. So I think we didn’t figure out as best as we could have how to pull people along, and how to figure out how to give people things to do at the level they feel comfortable with. And I think a lot of times in the franticness of trying to figure out what to do and how to respond ... that they’re cutting this program and getting rid of that, that it was all or nothing, we had to do everything. I think that a lot of people just figured that we were nuts ... that we were crazy. That we were possessed.

I was involved in trying to get different people elected mayor, because I thought some people would be more pro-education than the people who were elected. I ran for school committee and lost. [I was involved in] the whole override effort.

When I was president and working with the school committee that was in there for those first few years, I think I spent a lot more time meeting with people, not in a public way, trying to educate, persuade, lobby in a friendly way, trying to push people to change as opposed to having to be more confrontational, more publicly argumentative. The reason being, I felt like people, as I said before, were trying to figure out how to do the right thing. My style is that I think that I won’t try to publicly embarrass them or be publicly demonstrative against them even if I disagree, because I believe that if their heart is basically there, then you can work with people.

I think we have to figure out how to do more organizing to try and get rid of people to try and get a majority back on the school committee, and that’s a much more behind the scenes, slow, careful
kind of organizing, which is very difficult to do. It's easier to go to a meeting and yell than to do the kind of organizing that it would take to remove some of the people on the committee.

I know that in the last year I didn't put in half the time that I used to going to school committee meetings. I became involved in the building in the PAC where my kids are at. Most of my involvement had been at the city level and directed in that outer way trying to effect the bigger picture. I hadn't done much at the building level. So I volunteered as a math and reading tutor in one of my children's classes and went there one day a week and did a lot of read-aloud stuff in the school, and went on a lot of field trips. The energy I had I spent doing that. My regular job has become incredibly more demanding, so I have a lot less time. So the time that I had I chose to do a lot more in the building where both of my children attend. It's very rare in Millville that you have both of your kids in the same building at the same time ... so I said I might as well take advantage of it and get involved as much as I can in the building.

I've gone to four or five different lobbying rallies, gone to the State House, I've met with state senators and reps when they've had their office hours, I've called them on the phone, spoken before the Board of Ed on several issues, at Legislative Hearings, gave written testimony a few times, I've testified before US House and Senate hearings, submitted written testimony to [Senator] Kennedy, I've done a variety of things like that.

... It's hard to project what I'd be doing if I lived in [an affluent community], but if I was, I would hope that I was being outspoken
against school choice, and fighting it on the basis that it was going to drain needed resources from urban school systems. ... I probably wouldn’t be fighting at the city level, but hopefully at the state level around the budget and cuts in the budget.

Both of my kids do really well in school. It’s too soon to know, for instance, whether they’re going to drop out or not drop out or something like that, but they’re both monolingual, there aren’t issues of bilingual education, there aren’t issues, like I said, at this point issues of dropping out or anything like that. But my involvement is really stretched across all those issues, to try to be really involved and active in looking at questions of educational equity is extremely important. My wife’s a teacher, I’m well educated, and I think that even if we weren’t involved we could know our way enough around the system enough to get good teachers and good programs for our kids, but I’m in this not just for them. ... In Millville, I don’t think that people see that if you don’t respond to the racism and you don’t respond to the effects that has on the lack of educational resources, that does effect your kids if they’re Anglo kids. If your kids are in a school building where there’s no music anymore, there’s no art anymore, there’s no gym anymore ... or if your kids are at the high school and there are no advanced sciences, there’s no extra year of languages, there’s no advanced placement, there’s no this or that, then your kids are affected. Whether you immediately see that or not, the result of not dealing with the thinking that you can marginalize the Millville schools and the kids
in them just because the majority of the kids aren’t White, then your kids are affected.

Lots of people can’t just pick up and leave Millville. One way a lot of people responded was by just bailing. A lot of people can’t, particularly poorer White people. They can’t bail, they don’t have the resources to bail.

We need to try to figure out better how to create coalitions we need between those various people who still have their kids in the schools. And I think that’s one of our major tasks for the next few years. It’s not something you can do in a month or even a year. In the next few years, the leadership majority in parent involvement is probably not going to be Anglo anymore, if we’re doing this right. If we’re not doing it right, and that doesn’t change, then the school system is not really going to be advancing. That will mean that the majority of people with kids in the schools aren’t pushing hard to make the system better, which will mean that all kids will lose. We really have to figure that out, and I don’t know how we do that. We need resources to do that, we need help in organizing strategies, we need time to be able to think and develop a scheme, and time is what we don’t have. And resources we don’t have.

The first couple of years we were really trying to figure out, I think, where the entry points were for parent involvement, so we spent a lot of time kind of defining our role around issues of ... when policies were made, what should the role of parents be in the development of those policies. If you really want parent involvement, we don’t want to just rubber stamp something after a few people meet
behind closed doors - write it all up and then say here parents, sign off on the dotted line. ...

... One of the first issues that I tried to address as president of the city wide parent planning council was drop out rate in the schools. The drop out rate was extremely high. One of the first things I did, and then the city wide parent planning council took on was really raising the issue of drop outs, and making it a major focus of our activities for the two years I was president. We put together a city-wide dropout prevention task force and we influenced quite a bit the way the school system was addressing the issue of dropouts. The other issue was one of access to equal educational opportunity for students whose first language was Spanish, or who are farther along in the ESL program, issues of English as a Second Language education, and making sure that students in those programs get the same opportunities, have the same resources.

Another issue we really tried to address when I was in office was the content of school libraries. We felt that if students were really going to get a fair shake, that a lot of library books had to be in Spanish, that encyclopedias, dictionaries, a variety of resource books had to be in those libraries in Spanish. So that as students entered the schools and Spanish was their first language, that they could do those projects and do that research and would be able to read and find out and understand things like kids whose first language was English. As they transitioned, and got more of their subjects in English, that would not be as necessary, but it was only right that people be able to get a start and deal with and look things up and have
things in the language that they were most comfortable in. So those were two issues that really concerned us.

The other whole issue that we got involved in ... and on all these issues there's a long way to go ... but something that was also really important in the city of Millville was involving parents of Puerto Rican students in parent involvement activities, that that was another really critical issue. That the school system in Millville was moving and has moved from when I started being involved from probably 35 - 40% Puerto Rican students in the school system, to where now the majority of students in the school system are Puerto Rican. And parental involvement, if it's to be effective and really influence educational issues in the city, needs to find ways to involve parents of those students in activities. So I tried to be as involved as possible, and worked with the bilingual parent advisory council and other programs and also be involved with various community organizations in Millville that were predominately Puerto Rican in membership, like [a Latino advocacy agency] and other organizations and agencies to try to really reach out and let people know that the schools were their schools as well as the schools of Anglo parents. There's a long way to go, and it's not something you can ever stop doing, but I think we really tried in a really concerted way to do this.

The other thing that we all agreed upon early on was that there should be access to translation of all policy documents and materials; that meetings should be translated. Early on suggestions were made by the teacher who was working directly with parent involvement that we get headsets and other things to be able to do simultaneous translations at meetings and we always tried to figure out ways ...
I’m not sure if we ever came up with the best way ... but we tried as best we could to do that. The parent policy, rules, and other things, we insisted upon translation. Things that went home, notices, bulletins, everything like that, should be translated to make sure that people could read the stuff. We pushed for Spanish speaking outreach workers, we pushed for more bilingual counselors, and other things, to basically recognize that the school system was changing. And that as the population in the schools changed, so did the services have to change, and the people delivering them.

... I think at meetings we’ve tried to discuss how to get more people involved. We were able to identify and work with Puerto Rican parents who then turned around and worked and organized in their communities as well. So I think that one effect has been information, access to materials, has gotten out into the community more so than it would have otherwise.

I think we’ve impacted significantly around the dropout issue. I’m not sure how much would have gotten done if we didn’t push that, at least in the initial stages, and really tried to fight for that.

I think another issue that didn’t seem as significant to me at the time but that I think has had a great impact, is that parents were really involved in the long range plans and studies that were commissioned by the school committee to try and figure out where the schools were headed. And parents played a really strong role in those initial studies, and in the final process that determined additions and new schools. That has clearly had an impact. Puerto Rican parents, to my recollection, were not involved in any of those processes, but in retrospect, what we were really doing was fighting
for new schools and additions to schools which would be used and utilized by a majority of Puerto Rican students. So whenever we were fighting for resources, we were fighting for those kids too.

I think that as long as my children are in the Millville public schools, if we don't deal with those issues of racism, and of the city trying to deny education to Puerto Rican kids, my kids are impacted negatively also. If I'm not involved, my kids lose too. The cuts and the failure of the overrides, and all the negative attitudes toward the schools that a lot of people, who don't know anything, put out about nothing good happens in the schools, affects my kids. Because my kids are going through those schools, and when they decide where they want to go to college, if they do, or what they want to do with their life, if everyone's impression of the Millville schools is that they're lousy, that's going to impact on my kids, too. So, I think a lot of people are short sighted and don't see that being racist toward the Puerto Rican kids in the schools somehow isn't going to affect the White kids who remain in the school, and in a lot of cases in Millville it's people's grandchildren, and they just don't see it.

I think we've tried to say it's one school system. Different kids for different reasons, mainly based on how far along they are in being to be able to deal with their education in English, are at different steps along the way. But it's one school system, and it needs the resources equally directed at all kids and all kids when they enter school for the first time to the day they graduate, they should each have, regardless of the language they speak, or their skin color, or their ethnicity, they should have an equal opportunity along the way.
And I just figure if we do that, my kids benefit, as well as everybody else's kids. And if you don't have that premise, and you basically, particularly when the budgets are tight, spend all your time arguing over who's going to get a piece of an ever shrinking pie, all you're really doing is cutting each other's throat. And shortchanging all the kids. So, to the extent we're active and in as inclusive a way as we possibly can be, we benefit very kid in the city. And so be it, if 75% of the kids aren't Anglo, my choice is to live here. I don't want to live in a community that looks like the color of milk. I don't want to. My choice is not to.

I continue for a number of reasons. One personal reason, in terms of my own background ... I was the first person in my family to graduate from college. I was the person in my family to get any kind of advanced degrees after that and both my parents always impressed upon me the importance of an education. They were always actively involved ... in PTA and other things while I was in school; always visiting the classroom, talking to the teachers and doing all that kind of stuff, and that I guess made some impact on me because I felt as though when my children got older I would be involved. I also care about what happens to my own children, and I feel it's too easy to complain about what's happening in the schools, not just in this city, but in any city. It's easy to always be negative and not do anything about it, and I felt as though if I really cared I'd try to put that into some practice and become involved.

I also feel that as a person who's been politically active and involved all my life since as early as I can remember, and always
saw the role and importance of education and saw how hard people in places that couldn’t get access to education fought for it, that has always made an impression on me. I’ve always studied education, educational philosophy, took lots of courses when I was in school on the history of education, and just felt like it’s a cornerstone in trying to develop a society where workers can participate in the society, where average citizens can participate ... without information and the ability to read and understand what’s going on, you can’t really impact the society around you very much. So I’ve always thought that I had to be involved at some level in education. And once my kids were in the schools, it became real easy to think that that’s the way to do it ... through the schools they were in. That way I could do a few things at the same time. One, I could be involved at that building level, wherever they were. Two, bigger decisions that affected budgets, policy and things like that at the city level, I could also be involved, but not in an abstract way ... by knowing what was going on in the buildings that my children were in, I could have a practical impact on what was going on in the city, not just in an abstract way, but speaking from the basis of knowing what was going on.

... Every time I go to a meeting I ask why [I am still involved]. I guess it’s part of who I am. I believe that people should have a say in what happens to them. People should be able to make intelligent choices. And the only way they can make them is if they have an education. And the only way they can make them is if they have access to information. I came from a working class family, none of my four grandparents finished school. My father and mother finished high school. Education was important. Getting that
education was the most important thing that they passed on to their kids. Four of the five of us graduated from college. My father was also very active in his union ... he was a meat cutter ... I used to go to union meetings with him from the time that I can remember, and it was real clear to me ... one of the things he talked to me about around those meetings when I was old enough to have that kind of discussion with him was that there are certain things important enough to fight for, and there are certain things that you have to be willing to put yourself on the line for if you're really serious about what you believe in. And one of them to him was that people had a right to be treated with respect and dignity when they worked. Nobody had a right to treat anybody like garbage when they worked. Everybody should have a right to an education, to go as far as they possibly could go, and nobody had a right to put barriers in front of them.

I can remember when I was nine or ten years old, going to visit my grandparents in Atlantic City. We used to go there a lot in the summer for a week. And my mother said she was going to take me to see her best friend. The person turned out to be Black. That was probably the first Black person I remember meeting. But all the way to Atlantic City my mother was excited, excited, excited that we were going to meet her best friend. And I guess that had an impact on me too, because I wonder why some people think being prejudiced toward other people is OK, and why do some others not? What happens? What kind of a collision is there that makes some people think that's OK or that's not OK? And I just think of these different kinds of incidents.
My father died recently, and I spent a lot of time with him
during that time ... he had cancer ... and I can see a lot of his value
system, that, unfortunately, I never realized that he had at the time
that he gave me. It was not as though it was something that we ever
spent a lot of time talking about until there wasn’t time to talk about it
anymore.

So I think I stay involved because it doesn’t surprise me that we
keep getting kicked. We’re not on the majority side in America right
now. We’ve gone through Reagan, Bush, and all the other business,
and now a much more conservative state administration. Workers
and unions have gotten the hell beaten out of them for the last several
years. It’s just been this thing where we’re not going too well right
now in terms of all those things I talked about ... in terms of work,
democracy, involvement of workers, treating people who work with
respect, giving people access to educational opportunities ... So these
things come and go.

I study history; I spent a lot of time in college reading and
studying history ... things happen. I don’t take it personally, which is
the other thing. And I don’t do it, nor do I think anyone else who has
been involved in Millville does it for personal gain or for some ego
thing, or individual satisfaction. This is not the kind of thing you get
individual satisfaction from. The people I know who have been
involved, I don’t see anyone who has worked hard in this area to do it
as if it were a stepping stone to something else. I may disagree with
people on stuff, but I don’t see them using it as a stepping stone so
they could get something personal out of it, or so they could Lord it
over everyone and say, “look at me, I’m cool, I’m involved in parent
involvement stuff.” It’s too much work, and too much of a pain in the ass. If you’re doing it you’re not doing it because it’s cool. It’s not like having garden parties, it’s just not. I think the people who have stuck with it over the long haul came to it with some kind of constructive values and belief system that said that doing these kinds of things is important. If they hadn’t been in Millville doing parent involvement, I can picture most of the people being in Selma, Alabama working with people to integrate the schools, or working with people doing voter registration stuff in Mississippi. I think it’s just the character of these people. I don’t know if it’s just the coincidence that all these people were in Millville or what. I don’t think so; I just think that there’s a core of a lot of good people everywhere. And people have stayed involved and are doing this because they know they are right. You just have to put one foot in front of the other and keep walking. So for me, that’s why I stay involved; and I don’t want to second guess anyone, but I think most of the people have some kind of an inner belief system, something that grounds them, so that when we go to the school committee meetings and we get yelled at, and they tell us we’re out of order, we know we’re not. So we don’t believe it when they tell it to us. We have to figure out a forum to respond, and that’s where we have to go next, but when they tell us we’re wrong, we don’t believe it. We know we’re right. And the overrides, while they were really a setback, we weren’t wrong in fighting for those overrides. We weren’t wrong. So that’s why I think people continue. I don’t think people were convinced that we were wrong, but rather that the majority, in this case, was wrong. But, that’s the way it goes.
... I don’t think initially I anticipated that there would be
general opposition to parent involvement, that there would always be
some level of fight, that there would be the amount of fighting that
there is now. I think that I was naive that I thought that if we were
just able to make the argument that people would see that we were
right and that it made sense and that it would be a lot easier.

[The school committee] ... we didn’t always agree. I can
remember meetings where I got up at and yelled. As budgets got
tighter we started disagreeing a whole lot more than we did when it
seemed like the cash was sort of flowing.

I just think that people are beginning to try to figure out how
[parent involvement] ought to take a different form. I think what
happened was, if I would think about other political fights I’ve been
in about different things or about union organizing or other things
I’ve been involved in, this came fairly easily in relationship to, say for
instance, the struggle to try to racially balance the schools that went
on prior to parent involvement, or people, say, in Millville trying to
get people registered to vote, or access to voter registration, or having
city services become bilingual, and things like that. This came fairly
easily because the superintendent, the assistant superintendent, the
chairperson of the school committee and the majority of the school
committee philosophically agreed that it made sense to have parents
involved and fairly easily, with the education that parents and some
others did, saw that the schools would improve the more that parents
were in the buildings. I don’t think that the majority of people on that
school committee, and certainly not the top administrators, ever
questioned that for a second. And once parents organized themselves and were fairly articulate in laying out an agenda, they said yeah, that makes sense, come on in, let’s sit at the table and try to figure out some ground rules. We can disagree, but we’re all basically going down the same road. So I think where people are frustrated, and I know where I’m frustrated, is that it was fairly easy; we didn’t have to fight for a lot. So I think what we need to do now is recognize that it’s a different circumstance, and change our tactics and adapt to that change. Our kids are the reason we were involved in the first place is still there. Our children and other children in the city need and deserve a quality education, and all kids should have equal access to it. So the reason we did this in the first place hasn’t changed for any of the people that are involved. What’s changed is that the system now has thrown up some obstacles and barriers, where before the system helped us knock those obstacles and barriers down. So we now have to be more flexible.

I think we probably have to be more confrontational, I think that we have to publicly embarrass the school committee more ... and we can’t be as friendly. We kind of got used to going to meetings and being welcomed. ... We need to change. ... I actually think that if we can figure this particular period out, we’ll be better off in the long run, because we’ll have seen both sides. We’ll have had it when it was probably as good as it probably could get, and now we have it when it is probably as horrible as it can possibly get. And I think that most of the people who were active several years ago are all still active. People haven’t given up.
... It's *unthinkable* to me, for instance, that there's a search that's supposed to be conducted for superintendent and there's no parental input as far as I can see. If this was four or five years ago and the superintendent, who was really pushing for and open to parental involvement, decided he was going to leave, there would probably have been three or four parents on the search committee to figure out how to replace him. Now, if we get one it will be a miracle. Budget hearings are now gavelled to order, and parents can't speak until after the meeting is over. We're only allowed to speak when everything else is done. All the things that we really pushed for around parental involvement, in terms of outreach workers and budget money to do a lot of activities, all the kinds of workshops and educational things that we've done, the ability to go to national conferences and other things ... a *lot* of things we've learned by going to those activities. None of that can really happen with this present school committee. It's striking that on a variety of levels from early childhood education to whole language to drop out prevention to parental involvement, all over the country, in educational literature, at workshops and conferences, people were looking at Millville as a model for innovation. Now in six or seven months of this new school committee, that's been virtually liquidated. Almost all the people who were involved in that innovation are either leaving or in hiding, because they are afraid their life will be made miserable if someone can figure out who they are. So it's a real setback.

The first year, the summer of 85, we said “this is our vision. This is what we really want to be.” One of the first things we looked at was a book called *Beyond the Bake Sale*. Great title. I can't remember a lot
of things in the book, but I can remember the title. It’s the right kind of concept. Bake sales are fine and necessary, but we wanted more than the principal telling us they needed cookies for the Open House. We wanted to be on the agenda, and we were. And now to be on the agenda we have to fight. ... The building level is very hospitable. Because the principals who are aware of what is going on know that they need the parents active in the building to get a lot of the things they haven’t been able to get otherwise. The influence over policy, the influence over those kinds of things, there’s no way we’re going to have that without changing the school committee. They’ve set the tone and basically decided in their mean way that parents should be neither seen nor heard.

The assault on the schools has been devastating, but trying to do those things [establishing links with business] is like trying to put a Band-Aid on someone who has severed their arm in a lawnmower! There’s just so much that has been cut across the board, and so little regard for education, that if I have two or three hours I have to try to figure out with people how to do something about that bigger level ... as opposed to going to some company and trying to get them to donate some paper. The impact of what could come from those three hours is just significantly different. I didn’t think we’d be worrying about these things. My impression was, at that time, that we had an education president who would do all this stuff, [Governor] Dukakis was riding high and there was going to be a lot of money, and School Improvement Council money, and we were going to ride the wave of everybody paying attention to education. There had been an incredible amount of studies on parental involvement, there had been all this
stuff about how it improved kids test scores and achievement, [that there was an] attendance increase ... the whole climate was different. There was talk about reform, but reform was positive.

Now reform is taking away, reform is trying to figure out how to take away tenure, and now to take away this, and how to take away that, and the climate is just very, very different.

I went to a dropout convention, and a parent involvement convention ... it was incredible energy. And we've gotten nowhere in seven years, and we really mirror the nation. Then you get things like Kozol's book, and it's very depressing. I can remember that summer of it being very exciting ... meeting all these people, seeing all this stuff, having it all make sense, looking at a structure for organizing, what a great opportunity this was and what a challenge, but it was positive. It wasn't against anything, it was for kids, it was for letting everyone learn how to read, it was like mom and apple pie. And it's not that way now.

... I guess I can say I'm glad I've done it. If you had asked me if, after all we've been through, if I was glad that those folks called me, yeah. I probably would have gotten involved at some level when I heard about it, but I'm glad that they did. I don't have any misgivings about putting the time in now that I've done it. I think it makes sense. I think on a personal level my kids know how much I value education by seeing me do this. I don't think I ever have to worry about them taking it for granted. I think that they're older now and are very much aware of what's going on. They understand and have a level of commitment to these kinds of thing. I don't think I've
ever been overbearing with it, so I don’t think they’re going to end up being Alex B. Keaton. So it’s OK.

If I could do it all over again I’d do it. No question. It’s been fun, too, in spite of all this [laugh]. And for a while, when the climate was better, when things were really moving, there was a lot of exciting stuff happening. You can see what would happen if things were allowed to go. The involvement around the discipline policy, and the drug policy, the attendance policy, the dropout policy, the energy that parents put into the middle school reformation ... we made a difference. And we really came up with a lot of the best stuff as far as I’m concerned. And our energy was really there, and our ideas were really valued and respected, and if we hadn’t had to go through this last period, I think things would really be rolling. Like I said, there were some of the most innovative, exciting programs on all kind of levels anywhere, teachers were winning awards, programs were winning awards, it was just so exciting. And that wasn’t just because of parents, but it was with parents. And a lot of the most exciting things were with parents as key allies. So, it was great. It was great energy. It was positive energy.

The down side of this is that you’re still trying to fight for kids, but it’s all negative energy. So it’s hard for me to get as enthusiastic. It used to be more energizing, even though it was a lot of hours, a lot of work; a lot of meetings, a lot of writing, whatever there was to do, so you felt like doing it. And everything now is trying to keep from having something taken away. It’s very depressing in that sense. It’s hard to get energy from that. I think it’s hard for a lot of people who have been involved over the 80’s basically in one extent or another in
Millville to feel like they can be enthusiastic. We need something again to get us energized.

There have been periods ... like when Bernard Collins ran for mayor and beat Charles in that primary, there was incredible enthusiasm and energy, people were very excited and almost all those people you’re interviewing were very involved in that campaign. But people thought Bernard was going to win. It was very exciting. People really thought like it was going to happen. Who knows what that would have been like. Almost all those people were involved in fighting that trash thing, almost all those people were involved in fighting the demolition of buildings in South Millville, it was really one of the beginnings of [a Latino advocacy agency]. That’s what I like about living here, there’s always all kinds of stuff. You never run out of stuff. But, now we need a win. Lots of those people were involved in Bea’s campaign, and involved in both overrides. If we had won that first override, that would have been a real high.”

Eduardo Rodriguez

Eduardo Rodriguez came to Millville from Ecuador when he was six years of age. He first attended parochial schools in Millville before his family placed him in the Bloomingdale School, a junior high in the middle of the city. Eduardo was tracked into low level courses and then in business courses at the high school until some of his teachers recognized his abilities and encouraged him to attend college. He received a scholarship to the University of Massachusetts, from which he was awarded a Bachelor’s Degree. Eduardo, who speaks both English and Spanish fluently, and who has an outgoing
personality, could have gotten a job anywhere but chose to return to Millville to work in a social service agency because he believes in giving back something to his community.

Eduardo is married and has three sons, the youngest of whom attends a public elementary school in Millville. The middle son recently transferred to a private high school, and the oldest is a public school graduate. He and his family own their own home in the most affluent neighborhood of the community, where he was once defeated for a school committee seat. Eduardo believes that the defeat was based on racism.

In the early 1970s Eduardo entered his first race for school committee in order to raise issues of relevance to minority students who were living in that neighborhood. Since that time he has been involved in voter registration drives, campaigns for better housing, desegregation of the schools, and other quality of life issues.

Eduardo has been involved with the schools for more than two decades. He has served in a variety of roles, including president of building level PACs and as a member of numerous city wide task forces. He is well respected in both Latino and Anglo communities.

Interviewee's Comments. “I think there has been for a long time a real distrust of those people and people feel more and more alienated from the system. In particular, when I was living in South Millville, I felt that the people who lived in South Millville - the new migrants of the Puerto Rican community - were not enfranchised. They were outside the system. They needed, we needed, as part of the Latino community, to be included in that process if we were to make any kind of changes that would impact on our lives. That meant
becoming involved with the political process because that was where the decisions which impact the community are made.

It's an arena where decisions get played out, in a public arena; and we all know that there are decisions made by business people in other arenas that we have no access to. Those arenas are much harder to get access to and they are the ones of the power elite. They know how to get what they want done. They know who to talk to. We don't have access to those, but we do have access to the political process. That's how I saw the Latino community, the low income community, the African American community being able to make some changes in the governing body that affects them. I think changes that were going to benefit their kids, if we're going to focus on the schools.

Parent involvement is one way for people to be empowered and to get what they want out of the system that we're living under. If people don't participate in either the governance body like running for office or pressuring people in office or getting people to register to vote, or participating in the kind of structures that exist for people, then they are letting other people control their lives and control the decisions that affect them. I've always seen where people who aren't involved in this don't see the connection between their lives and people in governance bodies. They aren't sure why the school committee is important or the city council or the legislature or all those other levels of government.

During the sixties we saw a movement in the African American community that raised a lot of questions about the kind of education
that African American people were getting. It was more on the national scene where the African American community was raising the question of the validity of the education that their kids were getting because of the kind of history being taught, the role models or lack thereof in the school systems, the lack of an appropriate curriculum, aptitude tests were biased towards minorities, the tracking systems in schools, in this community as in any other community, where minority kids were being tracked into the dead end general courses and the college and business bound students were mostly not minorities. Those were the kinds of criticisms - whether or not the curriculum was meeting the needs of the minority kids.

Nationally, also, that kind of criticism was being leveled at the public schools by the Latino community as well - Puerto Rican communities in the New York, Mexican American communities in the Southwest. I think it held true in this community. What was happening in the mid sixties here was an influx of the Puerto Rican community where people didn’t really know what to do or how to handle this new group coming in. People were hoping that the Puerto Rican community would just go away, but what started as a small migration of people coming in ... was that people ended up moving ... into ... every ward and precinct in the city. I think the powers that be hoped they would just go away - like if you destroyed the housing stock, people would just move somewhere else. But other forces were at play - economic and political - that made that an impossibility because people just didn’t have anywhere else to go and people in the Puerto Rican community began to move into South Millville. By the
late sixties, there was just an increase in the Puerto Rican community and in the schools in particular. I think that the schools were caught off guard to begin with, but then they were very reluctant to make any kind of changes in their curriculum or anything else that was going to have a positive impact on the Puerto Rican Community - that they were going to get a fair shake in the school system. I think people were hanging on, hoping that they would just move away so that they wouldn’t have to make any drastic structural changes in curriculum, personnel, approaches, methodology or anything else. But, that didn’t happen and the school system started to move, but very slowly. Partially out of necessity in the beginning because they had to, but also there were parents who were concerned. The state also was at that point looking at the city - saying you need to start something ... statewide there had been a change in the student body composition and the bilingual law was passed so that things ...even at the federal level they had Chapter I and other programs to help minority kids.

Millville began to go after that kind of money - never using much of its own money for those programs that help minority kids. It was a combination basically out of necessity. You had this influx of kids who speak only Spanish and you don’t know what to do with them and internally I think some people saw the need for change and began to change. Outside forces as well - parents to some extent - but I think parents at that point, particularly Puerto Rican parents, were very disorganized or fairly new to the community. They were not empowered. They didn’t really feel that they were really part of the community. Many times the early migrants to the area thought they
were only going to be here for a short time, so, therefore, they didn’t really have a whole lot of investment. But some parents did and they wanted a better education for their kids, so there was some pressure from parents. The outside pressure from the federal government and the state forced the city to respond to the changing needs of their student body.

... I’ve never seen it as kind of this personal thing of “I’m doing this for my kids.” ... I’m looking at the system as a whole and more universal on the whole education issue and looking at it more in terms of justice and not “what am I going to get out of it.” Because I haven’t really gotten anything except for the feeling of satisfaction that things have changed - I have already enough of my own headaches and criticisms. I walk into a store and people say “oh here he is” [laugh] - in some ways in the last four years I’ve gained some more respect among certain people, but in the seventies when I wasn’t just advocating for education, but housing and stuff, people just saw me as a flaming radical who didn’t know what he was talking about.

I think a lot of what I said, that I proposed, that I criticized, the city for about education, housing, voter registration have been consistent and not without some basis of truth as to what I was criticizing for - mostly the treatment of the Latino community so I don’t feel that I need to get anything personal out of it.

...I felt that I was able to beat the system the way it was laid out for me. I went to a parochial school for six years. When we moved to Central Street I went to Bloomingdale School and was tracked into a general track and I was heading nowhere. I don’t know why I was
put in there - I think no one took the time to get to know who I was. But there were a couple of teachers there who encouraged me and kind of saw that maybe I could work independently so a couple of teachers helped me work independently in their Social Studies classes. When I got to the high school I was tracked into the general course which was totally dead end. A couple of teachers said, “maybe you ought to go on to college,” which I never even thought of before. Only in my junior year did I switch to a college track. Then I went to Millville Community College, then got a scholarship to go to UMass. I felt that education was a way to help me to improve my situation.

Education really is a way out of the track that you’re in. But you need to then contribute back to your community. I could have left Millville. Here I was, a Latino with a four year college degree. I could have gone somewhere else. I just felt committed to coming back and trying to work on the changes I saw that were necessary. I think that education, even though it’s a long term commitment is not like other things - like a job; if you don’t have a job you get jobs or try to develop jobs, or housing where you can get the money and renovate a building and have new housing. Education is a long term commitment. In education it’s at least twelve years before you see any kind of results. And then you may even never know exactly what the results were. But I see that as a way for young people who have never been given a chance to be productive. I guess to be productive is the best way to say it. A lot of young people have a lot to contribute but aren’t allowed to. So I see education as a way of doing that.
In order to stay involved I try to look at the positive stuff in changes - for example desegregation; that was a major change and a successful change and positive change. The fact that Bea - a Puerto Rican woman - got elected to the school committee was a positive change. I was involved in her election. Just the fact that the school committee voted for a parent involvement policy - that was a positive change and I think there have been a lot of ripple effects from that. But with those changes that occur I think there's always kind of a counter balance to those things that people become more entrenched and reactionary. I think that's what we are seeing now - we are seeing a very reactionary period - people are becoming critical of the school system because they don't feel committed to it. They're really not there to look at what's best for the kids. They're there to scrutinize the budget and cut what they consider to be waste. They have no educational agenda at all. I see it happening all over the country - it's not just Millville.

In the last twelve years, people have felt that it was OK to be self centered. That it was OK not to do for other people. That it was OK to be critical of people who had less than them. And it was much more in their interest to look at people who had more than them and try to get to where they are. You always look at people who have more than you - that's what you aspire to - you don't aspire to have less. And from Washington, through Reagan - he said it was OK to undo that social commitment to people. That is was OK for government to get away from regulations. That it was OK for government to back off from civil rights. It was OK for government not to be involved with fair housing and education because it should be laissez-faire. And
that attitude has been incorporated into a lot of people's way of thinking so that at the local level we have people now who are in control in the school system who think that way. That bilingual education isn't doing what it's supposed to do and it's the administrators’ fault. And they're really not looking at the education of kids.

... One of the things that I've done in the past is look at different strategies. Early on, what I did in the past was that I ran for public office knowing I was going to get beat because there were a small number of Puerto Ricans in South Millville - there were mostly elderly French Canadians and elderly French. But the focus of that was raising the issues. Raising the issues that there was a Latino community here that had certain needs and the school system had to change. Then I think it was more kind of like criticizing the system from the outside saying these were the things that were wrong. Then it was the lawsuit. Then monitoring the lawsuit. Then becoming involved with the parent involvement structure. And that's where I have been for the last number of years, being involved with city wide organization and Parent Advisory Council structure so that when there are changes, you have to change your strategy. The lawsuit was a strategy to open things up to making some changes. Now, the strategy for the last number of years within the city-wide organization and the building Parent Advisory Council is that we need to push the administration further on issues of curriculum, dropout prevention, parent involvement, making principals more accountable to some plan. At that time, the administration was friendlier to parent involvement and more receptive to change but
even that administration had some problems about making principals and other administrators more accountable to...say the issue of dropout prevention. All the stuff that we did around that, I'm not sure that we had any long lasting impact.

... There are a certain amount of activities that need to get done that are important, like running people for the school committee - if not to get elected, to raise issues. But hopefully to get elected so that you have some influence and impact at that policy making level. And there's parent involvement - getting parents together at the building level. And a lawsuit if you have to. There's a current lawsuit against the city by the bilingual Parent Advisory Council - I'm not involved in that one at all, but that kind of lawsuit at this point is still important. The city-wide organization survival is important, where five years ago its survival was a given and not part of the city wide organization's strategy, now it's not a given and there's a struggle on that. It's the same kind of activities - you know if the city-wide organization had to raise money to survive, then we would have to have bake sales and that kind of stuff, so I think the activities are the same, but it's at a different level; it's for a different purpose; it's for a different urgency. I think if people were to run for school committee now, it would be at a real different urgency level than it was about five years ago when the school committee was more friendly to parents and had some semblance of an educational agenda - not that you agreed with every one of them and everything they did, but it was different - there was a commitment there for quality. Now that is not there. So if a strategy was developed to run people for office, it would be with a different kind of urgency and a different kind of agenda. So
activities I don’t think change, but the quantity, the quality when you do it are influenced by the economic situation - the lack of funding, state or local politics changes at those levels.

... My goal is not to have everybody in the school committee think like me because I don’t think that would be a positive thing either. I think you need to have that kind of tension about ideas. That’s not my goal, but what I see as the ideal parent involvement is that you have parents involved - it’s a building based kind of management structure where you have principals who do the operational day to day kind of management - take care of the buildings day to day, but they have a plan that they’re working under, which would have specific goals and specific tasks on a variety of things. From curriculum development to alternatives to dropout prevention to other ways to handling discipline matters, etc. And they would be held accountable to the superintendent, to the school committee based on their plan. But as part of the development of their plan, it has to be done in a forum that includes parents. The idea of building based management is to me the ideal way for parents to become involved. They aren’t a separate group lobbying principals and lobbying school committees and lobbying superintendents. You build a structure so that a group of parents are a part of a governing structure within the building.

... In the seventies many politicians elected to the Board of Aldermen or school committee felt that they really didn’t represent the Latino community. And when you kind of asked why, their response was always that they weren’t registered and didn’t vote. So then we got people to register and then their response was, “OK
they're registered but they don't vote.” Because the whole issue is if you represent that neighborhood you should represent everybody. [Politicians] didn’t see it that way - it was like, well they’re not voters. Not like they’re not residents, but they’re not voters, therefore I somehow don’t have to represent them. I think that is generally true for a lot of people, that perception that low income people from downtown neighborhoods don’t vote and therefore don’t have the same rights or shouldn’t be represented or whatever. But voting doesn’t mean that or feeling that voting’s important. That’s aside from that. That’s an option that you have. You can register to vote and even if you register to vote you don’t have to vote. It’s not a mandatory thing. So, but people don’t look at it that way and the powers that be, business and politicians - their perception is that low income people aren’t entitled to the same rights as home owners because home owners pay taxes. But when you point out that renters pay taxes in their rent, it doesn’t sink in. People just don’t see that. And in their rent they pay sewer taxes, they pay water taxes, just like a home owner. But people just have a block about seeing this. So therefore it becomes an issue of home owner vs. renter and who has more rights. When you look at the neighborhoods, the more affluent neighborhoods are more home owner based, and the lower income neighborhoods are renters.

There have been lawsuits and there has been pressure from parents that have forced the city to look at its Chapter I program and to look at its bilingual program and the desegregation suit that forced the desegregation of the elementary schools - a real pivotal point in, I
think, opening up the school system. At that point all the schools were neighborhood-based schools and then kids would go into the junior high schools and for the first time begin to interact with kids of different neighborhoods and ethnic backgrounds, causing, I think, a lot of problems. It was always at that point that a lot of minority kids, both African American and Latino, drop out so there were very few minority kids that went to the high school. That started changing with more minority kids at high school.

Then it became clear that one of the problems was that there was a separate but not equal school system in the elementary grades. There was no integration there. That’s when the parents felt the school system was spending more money on schools “up the hill” and less on the schools “down the hill.” That the resources that were available to their kids in terms of just equipment were more concentrated “up the hill.” That new teachers who started down the hill and would gradually move up with seniority and transfers so you always had a lot of instability among teachers. I don’t know if that was true or not but the perception was that you started in the inner city and you earned your way to the more suburban schools in the city. So, for all those reasons, but mostly around equity, that it was felt that the schools “down the hill” were not being equitably treated that the lawsuit was filed. And even though ... that was probably the most traumatizing thing that happened to the city because it forced people to look at themselves, at what they felt about what was going on and what was going on system wide.

I remember very clearly at some meetings that occurred the fall before the desegregation plan was implemented that parents got up
and talked about how across from the Child Street School there was this building that had been vacant for months, the windows were gone and glass was shattered all over the sidewalk. They didn’t want their kids to go down there. They also said, “what are they teaching down there at the Child Street School? I don’t want to send my kids there.” They wanted their kids in the Powell Avenue School or Kramer Lane School. My response was that this was one of the reasons why this had to happen because previous to that no one really cared what was going on at Child Street School. They didn’t care that there was an abandoned building across the street and that no one was doing anything about it. They didn’t care what was being taught at Child Street School and that’s why it was important. That was the whole rationale behind the lawsuit. Now if your kids go down to Child Street School then all of a sudden you will be more interested in what’s going on down there. That means a whole change in distribution of resources and curriculum development. Of course, the school’s response to inequality of resources was that it really didn’t happen, you know, that everybody got their share. That in my mind was not true. So I think that desegregation not only brought parents out to think about what was going on at Child Street School, at Broadway, at Bloomingdale. Are they good or bad? All of a sudden all the parents wanted to know - not just the parents from that district. And I think it also unleashed a lot of creativity among teachers. Now there was an opening of opportunity when a bunch of money came into the city. There were changes in administration - a new superintendent - now administrators were willing to open up the flood gates here. Nobody really had an answer on what kind of
curriculum to have, how to deal with bilingual programs...the whole issue of parent involvement and a parent information center and other things. There was a plan on paper, but nobody had an idea on how to work that out. In some way that was good because it unleashed a lot of creativity and because of the influx of desegregation money it allowed teachers who really wanted to change their methods to go to training, go to workshops. I saw that really began to happen after desegregation. People were looking at things more creatively - especially at the elementary level.

The high and junior high schools were a whole different ball game at that point. What I thought was being created - and still is - I think was that you have kids now throughout the elementary school dealing with each other - getting to know each other. Not that they become lifelong friends or anything, but that stereotypes and myths about each other would be dispelled at the early age. Resources would be more equitably distributed - now it was no longer a matter of starting out in Child Street and Broadway Schools and working your way up to Powell Avenue School. Now you dealt with kids from downtown at Powell Avenue School and you dealt with kids from Broadway School at Center School. It didn’t matter what school you were in - you now had to change how you were doing things because now you had a very diverse group of kids to work with. The problems that came with that had to be dealt with building by building, not just in one or two schools.

In the beginning, when everyone held their breath and hoped for no disruption of the buses [laugh] and White backlash, it allowed for a lot of improvement. One of the fallouts of that was that a number of
parents took their kids out of public school - but I think not in the numbers people felt was going to happen. I think more people were willing to keep their kids in and that really helped. So those were the kinds ... that when you get involved with governing bodies, that's the kind of changes you can make. And it's a long process.

I think parents have a role in the education of their kids and that also means being involved in the setting of the plan of the building, of the curriculum, being involved in what's going on in the building. I think generally that's what should happen in every community. I think in this community that whatever kind of parent involvement, they have to be sensitive to the needs of the Latino community, the African American community, the Laotian community in Millville. It's hard to do without the staff, so in an ideal situation, a school system would have staff people who would be responsible for parent involvement because it's much harder to get parents from low income neighborhoods involved than it is from more affluent neighborhoods. Generally. It's not always.

One [issue] is transportation, another is language, another is culture. In the Puerto Rican community, part of the culture is that you have a lot of respect and admiration for teachers and therefore they govern schools so you don't say anything about that. And a lot of low income people in general have had bad experiences in school and therefore are not able to confront the teacher or principal and say, "I don't think you are doing something right." And it's a question of efficacy among low income residents in general. Many people don't have the concept that they can impact the system while people in more affluent communities do because either they are taught in
school or because of their own parents or they know a business person or they know a city councilor or they know a school committee member. They have that efficacy. They have the feeling that they can make an impact. They have the ability to make an impact on the school system. And I think that they feel they have a right to. And I think a lot of time low income people don’t feel that they have the right to the same access to schools or other things and in the current climate you can see why.

... But it’s not just socioeconomics, it’s that people’s education itself doesn’t allow them to understand their role in society. There are studies that show that in working class and low income neighborhoods that the way things are taught are different than in other schools and tracking is the same way.

Like in social studies classes, in certain tracks they talk about the structure of government and therefore you don’t have a role in that, but in other tracks they talk about voting and voter participation and the importance of voting and that kind of stuff. Therefore kids who are taking that understand why it’s important to them to vote. The college bound track that would show students their role in government and how they can impact government while more low income or general track courses would talk about the structure of government rather than focusing on your role in government. I think that - my experience with that is that is one reason why low income parents and families don’t see themselves being involved because they never really were shown their role in things. I think as part of a curriculum development - as part of building based management - I think that parents need to see what’s going on in the curriculum and
make the changes. And if it means changing the way things are taught, then that's part of it.

The city wide organization had a dropout task force and we worked within the school system. The superintendent set up a city-wide dropout prevention task force which included administrators and teachers and we had meetings and we made recommendations to him and the school committee. But they were not really implemented effectively and with the budget crisis of the last couple of years that has kind of gone by the wayside. For example last year we found out close to the end of the school year that the school system had received a drop out prevention grant of about $40,000 with which they had done nothing. So that’s really frustrating. We need to look at the objective conditions of where we are and be able to change our strategies to meet those. We can’t have the same strategy all the time. I think that’s the death knell for any organization that they are constantly doing the same thing over and over again when the objective conditions have changed.

So now the city-wide organization - I see that group as the leadership group of most parents - is to develop a new different strategy as to how to deal with the current school committee, how to deal with the current financial situation. I think there were members of the city-wide organization who took on leadership roles on the whole issue of the override. That was a different kind of strategy. This wasn’t the city-wide organization that did that, but members of that group started up that drive and attempted the override election.
In an urban community like Millville you have a larger Latino - Puerto Rican - community which is now over 31% of the population and over 70% of the school population. And an urban community that has an eroding economic base - in a community that has never really spent a lot of money on education - who's always kind of flaunted the statistic that they really spend less per kid than almost any other community in the state. Even in the heyday of money - in the seventies - Millville has never really had that kind of commitment. And I think part of it is that Millville has always been a working class community and therefore they have never seen education as a primary focus of what they should be providing for their kids. Because in the past there was always a job for somebody in the mills. There were always enough of those unskilled jobs that people could get into.

Now that whole thing has changed - the economic base is eroding in Millville - there's not those unskilled jobs. The new group coming in have very few skills, speak a different language, but are citizens of the United States and therefore have a whole different role in a community like Millville. And have certain other kind of unmet needs that the city needs to provide for. So the community is not there as you talked about in more affluent communities. There is an economic base. If it's not industrial, it's something else. The homeowners are willing to pay more because it's a more upscale or affluent highly educated community.
I continue my involvement because I see that it’s an issue of empowerment again. It’s an issue where people who are at the bottom of the ladder need to have their needs met by the powers that be - the people who control the political process. Because what I see is that a lot of kids in the lower income community, whether they be White, African American or Latino, have a lot of potential and have a lot of talent, a gift to contribute to society. But the problem is when they have these barriers that are up they end up being more of a drain on society. And a liability on society instead of an asset to society. We need to change. It just doesn’t feel just to me that some kids are just shut out because of where they are from or their ethnic background or that they live in a certain geographic area of the city. So that’s my reason ... you need to open up the system to something. It’s an issue of empowerment. Not that I need to be empowered, but it’s an issue that people need to take upon themselves. And that I can assist people to do that. I can help. That’s the role I see. I’ve never seen myself as a leader “per se.” I think being elected to the city wide organization, you’re elected therefore and in that way you’re some sort of leader, but I’ve never seen myself as the leader of a movement - more that I’m willing to say what needs to be said. I was willing to say things, I was willing to talk with parents. I was willing to help the bilingual Parent Advisory Council with their lawsuit. I don’t have kids in the bilingual program. I never had kids in the bilingual program. I wasn’t a member of the bilingual Parent Advisory Council. But I felt obligated to assist them as I felt that was a way to really break open the system and make it accessible to their kids. That’s kind of general.
Personally, I think my kids will do well in school because they get support at home that kids need. They will do well because they are bright. They will do well because they are intelligent and we provide them with things they need. A lot of families can’t afford or don’t have time or don’t have that ability because they don’t have the understanding of what kids need. And also if I felt there was something wrong in the school I would go and try to figure out what was going on within the classroom. If one of my kids came home and said ... was feeling kind of lackadaisical about school I would try to get involved and do something about that. I think a lot of parents feel that is not their realm. Teachers and principals know best. Parents don’t have a role in their kids education. But I feel that’s not true and my kids know that. So I think that they feel secure and they have the self esteem to do well.

I think we’re at a crossroads here. The city wide organization needs to take on that leadership role of helping to define for parents or with parents what their role is going to be. Right now I would say that it has to focus more on the political issues of running people for office or questioning the validity, sincerity, the objectives of the current school committee. Challenging their process. Challenging their decision making, and unfortunately at this point, issues of quality education per se, like advocating for a curriculum director or improving the resources - that kind of stuff. That’s going to have to take a secondary role because the current school committee doesn’t have an educational agenda. The agenda they have is more of a political agenda - more like wanting to change the very nature of how
programs are run and the commitment the schools have to bilingual education, to parent involvement, to the parent information center, to dropout prevention. I don’t like to make this artificial separation between those issues and curriculum and what’s being taught in the schools and how it’s going to be taught, whether whole language or developmental learning is going to be implemented - those are important things too, but I think they kind of overlap. But right now because of the nature of the school committee, the city-wide organization needs to look at the issues from a more political point of view. Of how to change the school committee and how to challenge the school committee on its policies and process which may be the whole role it has to play for another year or so. And then if there are changes made on the school committee through elections and those changes are positive for education, then I think the city wide organization changes its focus again.”

Kate Lee

Kate Lee has been involved in the public schools of Millville for more than two decades. Both her daughters have graduated from the high school, yet she maintains close ties with the parent organization that she helped to found. Her first involvement was as a parent at a small school where she thought she would participate in the traditional parent activities that her mother had as Kate was growing up, namely bake sales and field trips. A move on the part of local politicians to close her children’s school catapulted Kate into the political arena where she has been an active player ever since.
Kate and her husband reside in a working class neighborhood where they own their own two family home. Kate works outside the home as a manager for a local store and fills her off work hours by assisting local, state and national politicians who support public education get elected.

She is a graduate of Millville's high school, and she and her husband have resided in the city their entire lives. She is tireless in her efforts to support the schools, constantly writing letters, making phone calls, meeting with politicians, administrators, and community members.

Kate served as PTA president in her daughters' school, and then as a member of the executive committee for the central PTO, the precursor organization for the city-wide organization. In 1985, Kate attended a national conference on parent involvement, followed by one within the state with Beth Coffey. It was this set of circumstances that galvanized Kate into leading a group of parents to write the parent involvement policy for the Millville Public Schools.

Kate is in her thirties and of French Canadian extraction. She is not afraid to speak in public and to challenge leadership when she believes that people have been wronged. Many parents, politicians, and school administrators seek her counsel on a wide variety of issues related to the schools.

**Interviewee's Comments.** "I think that somehow parents have to organize enough to be seen as a voting block. As much as I don't want to see parents to spend all their time in politics, in the past when there was an issue, a budget issue, and parents started lobbying the board of aldermen, and they sort of gulped and said "will
you get those parents off our backs?" So I think if parents had that kind of energy and that kind of time and somebody to hold it all together as an organization to get that kind of stuff done, whether at the local level or the state level ... and there's been talk of that. We've worked with the parents from Springfield and we attended a rally in the fall or early winter with people from throughout the state ... and if parents were really more organized and if all parents would give a little more of their time ... some parents give a lot of time and some parents give very little or no time ... then we would be seen, I think, more as a general lobbying group.

My kids wanted me to [be involved]. ... My mother was a PTO president and I just always believed you should be involved in your kid's education. I think that somebody's got to be an advocate for kids. I think the system is filled with employees and most of those employees' hearts are in the right place, but that there needs to be some kind of connection between home and school and parents need to be accessible to the faculty and the teachers. I think it even helps that the kids see their parents being there and that the community cares about their education.

... The first event [that I was involved in] was when my oldest daughter entered kindergarten. The PTO at that school embraced parents immediately and said that the school administration at the time, school committee, were trying to close that particular school for budget reasons and they needed the parents in order to be successful in keeping the school open. We were successful in doing that for probably about four or five years. We lobbied school board members,
we did a lot of fund raising so that we were not a “burden” on the school system. We paid for crayons and pencils and things that other schools were just given so that it looked like the per pupil expenditure in that particular school wasn’t costing them a lot of money, and the teachers weren’t going to be let go. A principal’s position was going to be eliminated, but they needed the teachers for that number of students anyway, and they would save on the custodial and building costs, but the teachers’ jobs would be protected. So given that, we thought that if we funded a lot of supplies ... the building needed a fire exit, we raised money for a fire exit ... we figured if we weren’t a burden to the system that maybe they would leave the school open. It was sort of a special school, because it was small, and real family oriented. That’s what we wanted for our kids.

... Originally [the parent involvement policy] started as a result of attending national parent involvement conferences, other parent conferences, and seeing the difference between what was happening in our community at that time and what I thought could happen in the city. I think that we were lacking structure. And I think that’s a real key to the parent involvement policy, that there’s a structure. You put the responsibility to make parent involvement happen on the school administrators, the principals in particular, and the school committee. It became their policy. That principals would have parent involvement in each school building. And I think what was missing before in parent involvement was the structure, and the understanding as to who was responsible ... can the parents do certain things or can’t they? Are the parents in control over parent involvement or is the principal? Who is responsible to see to it that it
happens? If nobody calls a PAC meeting will there be parent involvement? And I think that was the real key to the whole policy. The policy involves a lot of other factors. Each school has parent representation, each grade has representation, they meet with the principal, they meet on important issues, on school based issues, and then they feed into the city wide organization that deals with issues that concern all of the children.

I think it [the policy] made parents more accountable because it gave them a structure that they had to work in. I've been involved in some PTOs that were real loose. They meet, they drink coffee, they might talk about crayons. I've been to other meetings that were very serious. I've been to some PTOs where the principal saw parents as cookie bakers, and I've been to some meetings where the principal saw the parents as real advocates for kids. So I think that it [the policy] did focus more and build more accountability for parents as well as for administrators.

... Originally, a friend of mine and I went to the superintendent of schools, told him what we wanted to do, and he said fine, go ahead, but make sure you have Hispanic people, Black people, parents of children at secondary level, primary level, all grade levels, each zone, males and females. Do what you want, we'll give you support services, phone access ... and as my buddy Beth [Coffey] says, he tapped us on the head and said to himself, “I won’t see them again.” So we formed that task force and worked on it [a policy] over a summer, ran it by Brett Ashley because she had attended some of the conferences with us and had some assignments in parent coordinating, and had a lot of history in parent involvement. He had
suggested running it by her, probably to get himself off the hook [laugh]. I guess he thought she was the expert. From there we took the policy to the school board and they adopted it.

... We sent a rough draft to the superintendent, and I don't remember if we shared it with principals. God, that was a long time ago. We probably should have. They played a real big role in what we were saying. I just don't recall that we did, and I'm not saying that we didn't.

... We made some changes [to the policy]. We gave up a little of what we wanted ... we changed the wording. Some of our words were a little too strong for the school committee, like being involved in the evaluations ... they don't like the word evaluations at all. So we used “input into evaluations.” ... And we decided to work toward certain things. A lot of the things attached to the policy weren't necessarily adopted by the school committee, even though it was part of the package. They were just part of our recommendations.

Job descriptions for outreach workers [weren’t adopted]. I don't think they ever fit our job descriptions or recommendations. We had a list of things schools could do to encourage parent involvement, like teachers calling parents. That was never implemented. We had a list of things for parents to do which could be handed out to parents which was not part of the policy.

I think for quite a while the policy was effective, even with that difference. I think it had a lot to do with the school committee. Maybe that's why we were willing to give up what we did. Because legally we didn't know what teacher's rights were under the policy. We didn't know if they could be forced to do things that we thought they
should be doing ... same with the principals ... so rather than butt heads on that or make enemies on that, we decided that we could work it out. And with the school committee at the time, I think we were all coming from the same place, had the same ideas and was pretty confident that we were understood. Maybe we should have fought for more to be part of the policy so that now we’d have more strength. But they’d probably throw the whole policy out the window if it was something they didn’t agree with. That’s just a matter of a vote. I just believe that if the language were stronger, [giving parents more power] it could hurt more us now.

I really think the changes in politics, the desegregation, and the overrides, and maybe it’s touched me on a different level than I would have liked. When I first started being involved it was more interaction with the kids and the teachers and the custodians and the school building, and it was one big family type thing. We did a lot of activity type things together, and now it seems to be more parents removed from the kids and we’re spending a lot of time and energy on politics. The changes in the position of the mayor ... when I first became involved we had a mayor who I thought really didn’t like children at all, he was there for a long time, and then there came some changes after that where I thought there might be a lot of hope. [The new mayor] believes that [parents] belong at home. I don’t think that he understands that they’re our kids and that we’re the consumer and that we’re the taxpayers and that we have the most at risk in the schools. I don’t think he sees that. I think he thinks he needs to be accountable to the rest of the community and doesn’t
weigh parental input any different than he does from senior citizens or parents of parochial school children. I think he should because those are our kids, and we're the consumer and we're the ones who have decided to keep our kids in the public schools, and we've helped shape those public schools through different committees and different participation that we have insisted on through the staff hiring process, deciding who we want teaching our kids, and who will be the building principal. We've invested a lot, and those are our children and they're the future of the community, and we should have more to say. I know it's political, and we're the minority as far as the voters go, but they're our kids. And if the schools don't respond to what we want, and we leave the community, or pull our kids out of public schools and put them in private schools, then the community loses.

From day one I was always battling the budget, so I don't know that it changed my involvement, but I think it changed the direction that parent involvement went. I think that it prevented parents from putting all their energies into working with the kids and the teachers, and we were forced to spend what little time we had always battling for money, lobbying different levels of government for funding.

Mayor “A” supported Proposition 2 1/2. I was raised to believe that we were responsible to provide a quality education for all of our children. And with the loss of fiscal autonomy I really began to doubt how that was all going to happen, and who decides how much money it takes to educate a kid. When you have different kinds of kids with
different kinds of problems, you can’t put a price tag on what their education is going to cost.

... I’ve been involved in override campaigns and political campaigns from school committee all the way up to United States congresswoman. Always my main concern when working for any politician is where they’re coming from on education, what are they going to do for the kids, what are they going to do for our city and our community, and where do they stand versus where there opponent stands on what’s going to happen in the school system. So I don’t know if I hadn’t been involved in the schools if I would have been involved politically the way I have been on campaigns, overrides.

... I think our children’s right to a quality, equitable education is in jeopardy, and we need to make sure that they get the education that they are entitled to, that every other generation has had in the past, and that it is part of their constitutional right to have a public education.

I came from the old school where PTO members bake cookies and didn’t deal with issues. I was naive enough and young enough when my daughter first went to school, that I thought that was what I was getting into. I wouldn’t have expected to become as political as I have become, say fifteen years ago. I’m not sure a parent should have to become as political as I have. I don’t think politics belong in public education. But, it’s happened, and somewhere in the middle of my involvement I thought, there’s so much potential for parents to shape things, to be a part of things, to be on committees and make big decisions ... we had gone through the desegregation process in the city, parents were part of that process; innovative programs, the teen
clinic, the new technical high school, exciting things were happening, and parents were a part of all of it. And now I see, it really hurts .. it's destruction ... they're destroying all of the things that we as parents helped to build.

... I think I would like to see probably eliminating the school committee. I think that if the school committee were eliminated, that then the schools could be run on building based management, and that parents would play an important role in building based management.

I think that the whole outcome of 2 1/2 indirectly, more than directly, has caused people to run for office, particularly the school committee, for all the wrong reasons. That it's gotten angry, and mean, and that they no longer run because they care about kids, but because they care about the city budget or they don't approve of the progressive type of education we're getting in our community. And I think that in a sense, that is the result of 2 1/2, the fact that there is no more fiscal autonomy, that now you have to work within a certain budget, and that the mayor is on the committee has changed a lot of what is now happening in school systems. I guess I'm referring to a lot of the administrators leaving, a lot of teachers leaving, probably a lot of families leaving as a result of that and so I can't say that it's 2 1/2's fault, but indirectly it is, that it's called attention to school budgets. Where before if you didn't have kids in the schools you didn't really pay attention to it, especially in our community where it wasn't really costing the homeowner, the state was basically paying the whole bill for education, and the homeowner was really kind of disinterested in what was going on in the schools unless they had
kids in the schools. Now it seems that everybody cares, and everybody criticizes, and everybody wants to have a say, and that’s where I come as a parent by saying that they really ought to listen to parents differently than they do the rest of the voters. Those are our kids. And when you see administrators who are leaving, I think that is a really big loss. I really think we’re heading backwards. That they just took as much as they could take, and in some sense they really believe that by their leaving that the children would be better off because at least something can happen now, whether it be in the right direction or the wrong direction, it’s no longer a personal thing against these board members who are out to make sure that so-and-so doesn’t look good or that so-and-so doesn’t succeed in the program that they’re doing. So, I think it’s brought out a real meanness in people and at this point, the meaner they are, the more electable they are at this point.

I think it [our diverse population] plays into it tremendously. I think if they were White, middle class children attending the public schools that the override probably would have passed. I think that the kids are misunderstood, that their family situations are misunderstood by the voting population. I think they all forget where they came from. That they, too, were immigrants, that other generations put themselves out to educate them and their families, and they don’t see the connection between not educating these kids and what it’s going to cost in the future versus paying for it now in a positive way.
And our system, even with the budget cuts, was doing a tremendous job with each child [handicapped kids, special needs kids, multicultural kids, kids from low socioeconomic backgrounds, kids from broken homes with a lot of social problems] and it was a real credit to the people working in the system who had enough vision to let that happen and it was one of the things that I think kept parents fighting for the money, too. We knew that the money was being invested in the future. Maybe they wouldn’t repeat their family history. Maybe they would go on to college and get off the welfare rolls ... and a lot of drug prevention and teen pregnancy ... a lot of special programs that cost money that were helping the kids.

... I think that the communities that directly surround ours don’t have the same kind of kids. The children in the school system here don’t always have proper medical care or enough knowledge about drugs, alcohol, sex education, AIDS; there are children who come from families where there are drug users. And unless those kids are given the kind of information that they need, then they can’t make proper decisions. They need a lot of support. There’s a lot of unhealthy situations and it’s just been an important part, and a place for kids to go when they need help, and an education beyond reading and writing that could save somebody’s life.

I think it might have been easier for me not to be involved if there had been an override effort right away. I felt I couldn’t walk out on the other parents who I’ve become friends with, who’ve kept their kids in the schools, whose kids I care about ... I couldn’t just walk away from them. And at a time when there was a big issue like the
override ... I think that there needs to be consistence in parent involvement. I don't think they needed me or anything like that, I just really felt that I wanted other people to lobby for my kids ... grandparents, neighbors, people without kids in the schools ... and I used to say to them that these kids are the future of the community, even though they are not your biological child, it's the future of the community, and this year I had to prove that that was what I really believed in [laugh].

I guess I sort of got hooked on it, got to believe in it, I saw that there were other people out there who weren't really putting the kids first ... that is school board members now, other politicians in the city; the mayor had a real history in the past of not supporting the schools, the city council, senior citizens, the population in the city that don't have children in the schools, and so few people in the city really care about the schools that I believe that parents need to be unified, and supportive, and hang in there.

... Some of [my activities] are the same. Some are different. I think part of the reason they're different is that right now, today, there is a lack of cooperation between the school committee and probably some school administrators. They don't seem to have the same kind of respect for parents, concern for parents, that previous school committees or administration had. I think that it's hard for parents to maintain any form of dignity when dealing with these people [laugh] and a we've learned a lot about what's a waste of time, and what works, and what doesn't work, so in that sense, some of the activities have changed. Certain efforts might have been a waste of
time. I can remember when there was a march on city hall and there were coffins, and we didn't get any direct results right away, or real rewarding results, we didn't try it anymore. Maybe it needs to be done again. This year the kids did it, the kids marched on city hall and got all kinds of media attention ... I think it was a good thing. I think the kids did what the whole community should have been doing. They did it over frustration that the override didn't pass, they saw a message from the community that they weren't important and they decided to take it to the streets. Parents used to do more of that. As far as what's a waste of time? Sometimes I think all the meetings we go to can be a waste of time. Because it's so frustrating right now working with a board who doesn't listen, and doesn't care, and isn't going to react to what parents want.

... What had worked was when I used to go to a meeting and it was a long meeting and I knew that action had been taken or action was going to be taken as a result of that meeting that was going to directly affect the kids' education, or the funding of schools, or whatever, then it was rewarding. And unless it's rewarding, parents aren't going to stay involved. Unless parents feel positive results, they're not going to put the time into it.

One [rewarding result] was the parent involvement policy. It was an issue that the school committee voted on after parents put a lot of time and effort into it. Another one was parents being allowed to participate in the hiring committees, so that parents had part of a say about who would be working in the schools. Another one was getting the school committee to change where public input was at school
committee meetings so that parents could actually speak at those meetings before votes were taken.

I think the new school committee is destroying a lot of things. You can’t destroy the new technical high school. But you can destroy the programs in a school. I think they have a different philosophy about what a basic education should be, what their responsibilities to children are. I think they’re starting to question how important the health program is, how important the teen clinic is.

... I think every school should have a teen clinic and a health program, but I think this particular school board is looking to take apart piece by piece the things that make our school system special. And I really do think that it was a special school system that has provided kids ... and looked at the whole child rather than just at a child’s abilities to learn their ABCs. I recently was joking with the former superintendent of schools and told him that when he comes back in five years, all the kids will be reading Dick and Jane books. Because I just think this committee doesn’t understand the whole language approach, a progressive type of education for kids. And that they think that the kids should be learning the way they learned. And the bilingual program is another one that they’re picking on and trying to destroy. Maybe it’s flawed. I don’t know. My kids haven’t been a part of it. I’ve heard a lot of criticism. But instead of evaluating it and making it better for the kids, they just seem to point fingers and accuse, and force kids to learn in a way that I don’t think is best for the child. I think that Millville has been a role model in a lot of innovative programs, and this committee doesn’t understand
that. And instead of going forward, they’re going backwards. One committee member had said once to the superintendent, it just sticks in my head, that we have to stop moving forward. And I can’t comprehend that kind of thinking when it comes to kids.

... It’s very frustrating. And I think it’s taken a lot of clout out of parent power or parent involvement. As I said earlier, in the middle things looked really good. We were doing things we wanted to do, we were being part of decision making, we were having an influence on what was being taught and who was teaching it, and it was rewarding. And I think that now you have to stay in there for the wrong reasons. Instead of staying in there to try and make things better, you have to stay in to try to keep things from being destroyed. It’s a political reversal.”

María Sanchez

María is the most recent member of the six parents interviewed to become involved in parent activities in Millville. She has been president of the Bilingual Parent Advisory Council because, in her own words, “no one else would do it.” As president, she led the move to reopen the desegregation suit against the city because she and other parents believed that children in the bilingual program were being denied an equal education under the law. María has recently become involved in the city wide organization, speaking at meetings, contacting members of the school committee on issues beyond bilingual education.

María and her husband rent an apartment in the one of the most struggling neighborhoods in the community. Both maintain
full time employment, María as a case worker for a community service agency. She has five step children and three children, the youngest five of whom attend public schools. Her children have been recently fully mainstreamed from the bilingual program. The oldest two girls attend a middle school and the youngest is in a magnet elementary school in the community.

María is a product of Millville's public schools and is in her early thirties. She speaks with great passion about her children and their future, and she dreams of a day when they will no longer have to experience the pains of prejudice. Her interview was filled with emotion and love.

She is respected by both the Anglo and Latino community of parents. She is calm, soft spoken and organized. María is still uncomfortable speaking English, but certainly has no trouble making her point in public settings.

**Interviewee's Comments.** "The schools should go door to door and not expect the parents to come to meetings because of lack of transportation or child care. They are not able to go - especially those that are far away like Silber Avenue, Hawley Street and Center school. And I was remembering back to when desegregation started - they used to have buses come to South Millville when there was a parent meeting. They used to pick up the parents and bring them to the school for parents meetings. Parents used to go to those meetings. Also, when they stopped those buses, the teachers used to come down here to Broadway School and to Child Street School for those parents who live close by for parents conferences. Another way to get parents involved would be to have shows before each PAC meeting - like
having the kids give presentations. That will bring a lot of parents because they like to see what their kids are doing. It will bring a lot of parents. I think going door to door, having bilingual bicultural staff - someone that they could call and when they call they would feel comfortable talking to them. One suggestion I made to some of the bilingual teachers was like sending a note to the parents at least once a month to start building a relationship with the parents. And finding ways that the parents could volunteer where they don’t have to come to the school, like maybe if the teachers were having a project and need some cutting - maybe sending the things home with the kids and asking the parents to cut and send it back. And doing this continually until parents build a relationship and feels that the teacher really cares what I do and sooner or later the parents will start coming to the school.

I like to participate in any activity that will touch the life of the Hispanic community. I also like to know what’s going on. I just don’t like to get the information from someone else because sometimes the information could be wrong. I think that what led me to get involved was my family and friends. Even though my English is not that good, I was the one who served as translator, and as an advocate for services and doing all this I could see lots of injustice. And little by little I started to go to this meeting and that meeting, and I came to realize that I was hooked.

Why do I continue? For me, instead of things getting better, they are getting worse - the economic, the social problems, crime
... These activities are a priority to me because they mean the future of my children. I’m hoping that when they grow up Millville will be a place where everyone will be treated like equals, a time when education will be the priority of the city and that city government will learn the true meaning of quality education for everyone.

... The battles for TBE [Transitional Bilingual Education] are the same. Like I said, we are going back. The only difference is that now I’ve talked to the school committee, and even if I’m nervous I let people know the way I feel. Voter registration is a new one for me. I never got involved in politics at first. My political involvement has been for the last six years. The reason that my activities are different is that I have more knowledge now. Politics has influenced my decisions a lot, seeing how some city officials refer to the Hispanic community or about positions that help the community really make me take a stand on some issues. One big issue that is happening now in the Millville Public Schools TBE Program is that the program doesn’t receive the respect from the school committee and sometimes from teachers in other programs. The program has suffered big cuts which damage the quality of the program. There were no ESL teachers, or not the number we needed. Behavior problems within the TBE program has increased because of bigger classes, and teachers might or might not have any experience in the bilingual
program and who sometimes don’t know the Hispanic culture and therefore might not be able to understand the problems.

I think the parent has to really get to know the school committee, the function of the school committee, the function of the city wide organization and really know what’s going on with the schools. I think that was one of the biggest mistakes. I was involved in the Bilingual PAC since the beginning but I really didn’t know all the laws about the bilingual program, I didn’t know the laws about what the school committee was there for, what the city wide organization is there for. I didn’t know the laws about education at all. So I think one of the biggest things that the schools could do for parents is educating them. This is what your kids should be getting and this is the way they should be getting it. Like I said - educating the parents. I think the parents should get educated about the functions of the school committee and the schools. I think door to door is the best way, especially to the Spanish parents. It was like coming from Puerto Rico and being raised by Puerto Rican parents, it’s a lot different for us. Like - whatever the teacher says or whatever the school says is right. They don’t question that. And I know that for a fact. They say the parents don’t care about their kids in school or they don’t care about their kids education, but it’s that being Puerto Rican like they have a saying that the teacher is your second parent so that anything that the school says or anything that the higher ups say, that’s what they believe. It’s not like they question anything the school says. So if the school says that they don’t have any money to buy books, the parents will believe that they don’t have any money to buy books. And
they won’t bother to come to meetings either. Because it’s not the thing. It’s like taking their kids to school, picking them up and going home. It’s not like those issues in parent involvement in Puerto Rico. It’s more like I was saying, bake sales and going to help out in the schools. ... But it’s trust, much more. They care.

... It’s like the doctor - they won’t go for second opinions because what the doctor says is right. They think that everything they say is right. I think they have to be educated about that. Like now the money issue. They take it for granted that the school committee is doing what it’s supposed to be doing with the money. They don’t know better. And they do get involved in schools, but it’s not like the same here. Like I said, they will go and clean the school. They will go and help in the lunch room and things, help on field trips like that. In Puerto Rico there’s no PAC meetings and no school committee meetings. I don’t even think they even have a superintendent.

I continue [to be involved] because of the money issue. That is the mayor or whoever didn’t think that the money should be used for teachers and the classroom. I think that was one of the main issues that made me take a stand. Like I always say, if I don’t do it, nobody else will. I’ve been involved a lot and that’s why people started saying you should do it because you have been in the program for a long time.

... I think one of my main issues that I mentioned before is how divided I feel the bilingual program is from the other programs, and especially when we were having the parents input for the sub committee, we were having little focus groups with parents, how
different a lot of the service is that the bilingual kids receive than the mainstream kids receive.

... I don’t like the way the bilingual program is run. I am in favor of bilingual program, and I’ve been trying to get this across to people. I’m in favor of bilingual education, but the way the bilingual program is run in most of the classrooms in Millville, I don’t like it. I think ... two way bilingual, I would love for all the schools to have it two way bilingual, because I think it really works because the kids get more English, even though they don’t get much English now because a lot of the ESL teachers have been cut. But for me, I think the best way is two way bilingual. I really believe in two way bilingual. And I think the bilingual program is really separated, that’s why the kids feel ... a lot of the behavior problems the kids have now is because of the ... its big issues ... for me being in bilingual now is like being in special needs. Because they are dividing. I would love for that to change. It really gets to me. I think a lot of the behavioral problems that the kids have in the bilingual program is because they feel insulated, they feel left out so the only way they are going to get attention is by acting out. And I really hate to see that. I haven’t had problems with my kids. I have my home, my husband, when I’m not at home my husband is always there, if we are not there my mother is there ... they always have somebody to go home to. A lot of kids in the bilingual program don’t have anyone at home. When they get home there is nobody there for them to say this is the right way to do it. The only structure for a lot of them is in school. And in school they feel left out. They act up. That’s why I think there’s a lot of dropouts from school. A lot of the bilingual teachers, I know they are good
teachers, but some of them ... its like they're too soft. I know some teachers who let the kids do anything they want, especially in the middle schools. I don't think it's a big problem at the elementary level, but once they get to junior high and high school there is a big behavior problem, and I think it's because of the way the way the teachers handle discipline in their classroom. They're good teachers but they're not strict enough.

This girl was waiting, she didn't hear good. The mother has asked for ... or the school was supposed to provide something to help her hear better in the classroom. She was waiting for the whole year. The school year was over and they haven't brought it yet. I know that if anyone else had the same problem it would be there like right away. And I think that was one of the main problems. The mother maybe didn't know all the rights she had for her children.

I'm just hooked, and things are getting worse. When because of cuts and changes in government, and changes in different points of view, when these things happen the ones who suffer the most are the minorities, the low income people. Because of cuts, desegregation plans have been violated, the kids are suffering and city and school government are using this to really hit the programs that are there to benefit minorities, like bilingual ed. This has really influenced my participation in school issues and voter registration drives. The school committee needs to know that there are people looking out for their children. And with voter registration, I strongly believe that the power is in the vote.
You know how there is only one bilingual PAC? A big bilingual PAC? If we get twenty to twenty-five parents, unless it’s an emergency meeting, that’s luck. I think that when I got involved with the former director, we used to have individual bilingual PAC meetings in each school. In the personal schools we had the meetings, and there was a lot of parent involvement instead of having one big issue. A lot of parents think that the issue doesn’t concern their school, so why should they go. If I have a bilingual PAC meeting at Bloomingdale School, some of the parents just won’t go because they think it’s just for Bloomingdale School. They will say “I don’t have any kids at Bloomingdale School,” thinking that it’s just an issue for Bloomingdale School. I think meetings should be together, both PAC and bilingual PAC. I like the way Center School did it this year. Center School has two parents, one Hispanic and one Anglo. I don’t know how good the Hispanic president was, but I think that’s a good example for other schools to have... having two presidents and having both meetings together. Call it the PAC meetings together. I think a lot of problems in the bilingual program is because of division. The division from other programs. That’s one of the main problems... the division. That’s why a lot of the Anglo parents don’t see the bilingual program as working because of the division and a lot of the behavioral problems. For me, it’s because of the division. And I hope that we have a good director this year. I hope so.

... The only problem I had this year was that they didn’t have enough money and my daughter was supposed to be in ESL since the beginning of the year and she was put in bilingual class. Then in the
middle of the year she was changed to ESL. That transition was the worst thing that happened. Or making decisions without letting me know personally. Like when they changed Yaritza from the bilingual program to ESL, and I thought she was in ESL in the beginning, and I was wrong. They sent me a letter that tomorrow your daughter will be going to an ESL class - it was like one day before it was to happen and I sent a letter back to the teacher saying that it's not that I disagree, but you need to let me know more ahead of time about important issues that will affect my kids. ...and [to other parents on] the rights that they have for better education for their children. And they really know what a better education means because they think they're sending kids [to school to learn]. I'm talking for myself, I was just sending the kids [to school] before [and I did not know] what the teacher was doing or the school committee was doing. [I thought] everything [was] first of all for the kids to have a good education. If more parents knew their rights, they'd be getting more involved in the schools. Like I said before...is that...In Puerto Rico the parents always believes whatever the teacher says or somebody on the school committee, whatever they decide for the kids is the right decision. They don't question any of the decisions the teachers make. They will take the kids in the morning and they will pick them up in the afternoon and they will not question anything that the teachers say or even the school committee says. That's one of the major things. The teacher is like the second parent. I used to say to my kids, whatever, the teacher is right. You are there eight hours and he is your second parent. You have to respect the teacher.
... Being president, you should have a good relationship with the principal or the director. For that director to keep you informed on everything that's going on. Like when the budget cuts were happening in the bilingual program, I used to see the city wide PAC working hard during the summer. ... This year I was lucky to have the city-wide organization that kept me informed on everything that was going on. ... I think the director of any program should be involved in the PAC too. That's it.”

Summary

The case studies in this chapter have highlighted the intensity and depth of involvement of the most active parents in Millville. In many cases time has dimmed their memory, and a survey of newspaper articles and other documents in the parent collection provides a much deeper, much clearer essence of what their participation has been and has done for the community of Millville.

The involvement of these parents has not only been reactive to the political climate of the decade, but has included many proactive stances as well. The initiation of the dropout prevention task force; the position that all materials sent to the homes be in both English and Spanish; that meetings have proper translation; that parents serve on interview committees for administrative staff are among the proactive positions that parents have insisted upon. The issues of inclusion for parents as well as students has made a positive impact on the character of the district.
The case studies themselves illustrate the breadth as well as depth of the interest that parents have taken through their political involvement in this particular urban school district.
CHAPTER V
DATA ANALYSIS

In Chapter IV the voices of parents are captured clearly by the inclusion of major portions of their interviews. These voices are crucial to the data because their eloquent words provide an enormous amount of meat for the study. The reflections of Kay, Kate, Beth, Daniel, Eduardo and María are real and filled with passion. Other data which had been reviewed for the study seemed flat and academic in comparison. By providing an opportunity for their own words to paint a picture of parent involvement in the political arena and by juxtaposing parental involvement data in an historical context, this study will show examples of real life struggles that parents have had as they search for educational equality for their children.

The qualitative study goes beyond the six interviews by incorporating my more than eight years of observation as a staff member working in parent involvement with these same individuals. The extended period of time during which I was able to observe the participation of parents in governance activities in Millville as well as observe other political events at the local and state level has added meaning, depth, and context to the data. In many cases I became part of the same community as the subjects, and this perspective has provided me with a wide range of experiences from which to frame the qualitative data. In many ways, these experiences allowed me access to forums where I acted as an advocate for and communicator
about the activities of the parents being studied. This is the case for many anthropologists (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

Through boundary spanning (Schensul, Schensul, Gonzales & Caro, 1981) I was able to move in and out of the parent group without actually being a member of it. As a staff member whose primary assignment was to provide technical assistance to parent groups within the Millville School District, I attended their meetings, communicated in particular with their leadership on a regular basis, provided them with information on district as well as political issues, advised them on strategies for organizing, and monitored and evaluated their activities. However, at no time could I vote, and it was understood that at meetings I was there as a resource and not a participant. They had a culture of their own, and although their leadership may have changed from time to time and their membership may have varied, I was clearly an observer and not a part of their culture (Goodenough, 1976).

From my analysis at the interviews and based on my knowledge of the participants, I believe that the summer recess placed the interviewees in a more mellow frame of mind than they would have been if responding to the same questions during the school year. The school committee had been on break for more than six weeks, and the parent group had not met since mid June to share information and strategize. The parents had not had recent interactions with a committee whom they perceived to be at odds with them; they had no current issues of frustration, and were as if waiting in a suspended state for another round of interaction to begin.
It is now more than seven months into the school year, and the school committee has not appointed a replacement for the parent involvement staff person to work with parents. Many of the tasks formerly attended to by staff members such as coordinating elections and sending out centralized communications now rest on the shoulders of the parents. Parents find themselves without access to information and lack a central and accessible place to get it. The city wide organization has written to the Massachusetts Board of Education as well as to the Massachusetts Department of Education’s Office of Equal Educational Opportunity in an effort to seek redress to budgetary and policy issues between the parent group and the school committee. These events and the demands that are normal to a school year with a full schedule of meetings to attend, activities to transport children to, and the general routine of being involved with the schools may have revealed additional or different responses to questions in the qualitative interviews.

The interviewees were guided through a series of questions, focusing on five general areas:

- their involvement in the schools;
- how they became involved;
- the changes they have seen in the schools since the passage of Proposition 2 1/2;
- how their involvement has changed because of the passage of Proposition 2 1/2;
- what they perceive to be the future implications for parent involvement activities in the next decade.
Responses were broad and varied, and many of the respondents acknowledged similar positions on issues. Eight thematic areas emerged, and I have organized the qualitative data accordingly, including the role of recruitment on parent involvement; reasons the participants became involved; the influence of politics on the participants' parental involvement; the impact of a diverse population on the involvement of the participants; district wide issues; lack of community commitment to children; reasons for continuous commitment to parental involvement; and issues of frustration encountered by the participants.

**Emergent Themes from the Case Studies**

Personal empowerment/community empowerment

Parent involvement has provided many a mother or father with an avenue to seek self improvement or has brought them to the realization that what they have to offer to the community and the schools in particular cannot be diminished. For many parents the parent involvement movement has allowed them to recognize their own strength and ability, and has given them the courage to stand up and ask for what they believe their child and other children in the community are entitled to. The matter of personal empowerment and community empowerment is one that transcends the boundaries of race, socioeconomic status, age, and gender.

For more than a decade, the parents interviewed have been deeply involved in the public schools of Millville through governance activities. They continue to be involved despite the enormous time
commitment and deep frustrations. They understand the issues of multicultural education and the importance of their children living in a pluralistic society. To a person, they emphasized the benefits of having their children attend schools with a diverse student population, and how much that enriched their lives.

In the spring of 1985, Kate Lee returned from a national conference on parent involvement. She was animated in her enthusiasm and confident that the Millville Public Schools were ripe for an organized parent involvement plan. She was a veteran parent, having served as a PTO president a decade before when the city of Millville attempted to close the small, neighborhood school her children attended. She was one of the organizers of the central PTO, the precursor parent organization the current one in Millville. Mrs. Lee had been involved long enough to see what the shortcomings of the current system were, and armed with new information and suggestions, she was ready to try something new. She learned what was a waste of time and what was not. No two schools had the same type of parent organization. There was no one coordinating parent activities. Involvement was fragmented at best. She concluded that what Millville was lacking in parent involvement was a structure and accountability.

I think that was missing before in the parent involvement was the structure, and the understanding as to who was responsible ... can the parents do certain things or can’t they? Are the parents in control over parent involvement or is the principal? Who is responsible to see to it that it happens? If nobody calls a PAC meeting will there be parent involvement? And I think that was the real key to the whole policy.
Later that spring, Mrs. Lee and Beth Coffey, another parent, were invited by the superintendent of schools to attend a state conference on parent involvement sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Education and the Institute for Responsive Education in Worcester. The enthusiasm of Mrs. Lee was infectious, and Mrs. Coffey was caught up in the movement.

Parents having a voice, parents being listened to, parents being advocates, the things that Cambridge was doing at the time in terms of schools of choice, and magnet schools, and I thought to myself, we have an ideal situation! ... I knew of Kate's involvement with the Central PTO, and the whole bus issue, and that she had been a school committee member's campaign manager, I knew the kinds of things she had done. And my analysis of a lot of that was that she had some good ideas, and that she had done a lot of things with the Central PTO, but that “A,” it was crisis oriented, and “B,” it wasn't the same in every school, and I felt that that was one of its absolute weak links, because if you weren't the same from school to school in the district, it wasn't going to work, and “C,” it was the same people all the time.

Determined to craft a parent involvement policy for Millville which would meet the needs of the community, Mrs. Lee and Mrs. Coffey made an appointment to see the superintendent of schools to share with him what they wanted to do. He encouraged them to move forward, and they formed a task force composed of parents from all grade levels, attendance zones, male and female, African American, Latino and White; parents with children in Special Education and Chapter I, and a parent who did not yet have children in the schools. They met over the summer and gathered volumes of material on parent involvement from all over the country. They were determined, as Mr. Erklauer puts it,

... to get parents involved in a really substantive way. Not just selling cookies and stuff like that, but actually
trying to influence policy and try to involve parents at a level that was really important.

They brought their draft to the school committee in the fall of that year and it was subsequently adopted. A staff member was assigned duties to assist the parents in technical and organizing areas, and to provide them with whatever access they needed to training, meetings, policy implementation, and general organizational management. With a policy in place, the role of recruitment was their next task.

Strength in numbers

Without being able to increase their numbers and to bring new people and ideas into their organization through recruitment, parents knew that their days were numbered. It was also certain that unless they were able to bring more minority parents into leadership roles that their organization would be out of touch with the lives of the majority of the children in the school district. The upper echelon of parent leadership kept the issue of expansion in the forefront and made numerous efforts to bring new members into the fold.

The first steps in involvement for most of them was the personal contact; someone asked them to be involved, and they felt needed. They all know and believe that their involvement is making an impact not only on the lives of their own children, but on the greater community as well. Kay Cole recalled that when she first tried to get involved at her daughter's school no one seemed to need her. Early attempts at involvement for all of the women interviewed were in fundraisers, bake sales, organizing for puppet shows, whereas for
the men it was specifically in a political nature as either an author of policy, or as a candidate for school committee.

The attention to fundraising was short-lived, though all have agreed that they would engage in that type of activity once again if necessary. Politics began to occupy much of their time.

Both of the men who were interviewed had at one time been candidates for elective office in school committee races, while the women stressed interest in building relationships. The importance of recruitment recurred numerous times in the interviews. According to Kay Cole, the most important part of parent involvement is communicating, and recruiting a network of people who can be motivated and activated when issues arise. Carol Hardy-Fanta (1992) found similar data while studying Latino men and women in Boston politics:

Latina women focus on the relational aspects of political mobilizing while Latino men emphasize gaining access to positions in government.

The women mentioned coalition building and the importance of making other parents feel welcome and secure, while the men did not mention that as an issue. According to Kay Cole, three simple words, “we need you,” from Beth Coffey and Kate Lee, made all the difference in the world to her.

It’s got to be very difficult for somebody who doesn’t have a lot of self confidence or knowledge or doesn’t have the language to come in and be a part of it.

Beth Coffey articulated that one of the issues of concern to her was the issue of inclusion.

There were a lot of parents being excluded, and that bothered me.
The role of recruitment was very important to her. In her opinion, if it were not built into the policy that officers needed to change, that people could not remain in the same position for the duration of their child’s educational experience, then parent involvement would not grow in the district. It was a call to Daniel Erklauer by Beth Coffey that triggered his involvement, even before his children were in the public schools. He spoke about the process of involvement and the commitment on the part of parents to

... be open and democratic as possible. We established that someone could only assume a position for a maximum of two years.

Eduardo Rodriguez is more political in his approach, even to the issue of recruitment. He believes that in order for people to be empowered they must become part of the system.

We needed, as part of the Latino community, to be included in [that] process if we were to make any kind of changes that would impact our lives. That meant being involved with the political process because that was where the decisions which impact the community are made.

María Sanchez is quite direct in her perception of how parents should be recruited and included.

The schools should go door to door and not expect the parents to come to meetings because of lack of transportation and child care.

Political power

The last decade has seen a paradigm shift in parent involvement in schools. Parent involvement in the past focused exclusively on organizing fundraisers, assisting with homework or activities at school, and attending open house or parent/teacher conferences. When Proposition 2 1/2 passed on November 4, 1980, the way parents
interacted with schools in Massachusetts changed forever. In Millville, parents became more organized and aggressive.

The community of Millville is heavily reliant on the state to fund its schools. An eroding property tax base and a population with few children in the schools set the scene for conflict at the local level. In the minds of the parents, it became more important to impact the budgetary process than to worry about what puppet show would perform for the first graders. Lack of simple supplies such as crayons and books, consolidation of classes because of teacher layoffs, cut backs in programs demanded the attention of parents across the district. A mayor who many believed was insensitive to the public schools and their plight provided parents with a lightening rod, while the real culprit was the unequal formula for funding public education in Massachusetts through heavy reliance on the property tax. Children who reside in Millville, because of an accident of geography, are not afforded the same educational opportunities as children from Lexington or Lincoln or Dover-Sherborn. Parents continue to press their legislators, to write letters, to march on Boston, and to arrange press conferences to illustrate their case. They testify before the Massachusetts State Board of Education, at House and Senate hearings, and write letters to the editor. They speak on a regular basis before the Millville School Committee to insist that what dollars are allocated for education be spent in a manner which they believe are in the best educational interests of their children and others, and they file suit when necessary to protect children’s rights.
A common belief on the part of the interviewees is that their involvement will, if not help things get better, at least forestall some of the destruction that these parents see happening to the schools. María Sanchez points out that “unless we talk about it, nobody is going to care.” The majority of them never imagined that they would become politically involved in the schools and the community; their activities have changed dramatically from what they thought parent involvement would be. According to Kate Lee

I came from the old school where PTO members bake cookies and didn’t deal with issues ... I wouldn’t have expected to become as political as I have. I’m not sure a parent should have to become as political as I have. I don’t think politics belong in public education. But, it’s happened, and somewhere in the middle of my involvement I thought, there’s so much potential for parents to shape things, to be a part of things, to be on committees and make big decisions...

Daniel Erklauer, a former school committee candidate, is politically involved for a number of reasons.

Both my parents ... were always actively involved ... in PTA and other things while I was in school ... I guess it made some impact on me. I also care about what happens to my own children, and I feel it’s too easy to complain about what’s happening in the schools. It’s easy to always be negative and not do anything about it, and I felt as though if I really cared I’d try to put that into some practice and become involved. ... I could have a practical impact on what was going on in the city, not just in an abstract way, but speaking from the basis of knowing what was going on.

María Sanchez continues to be involved for political reasons.

These activities are a priority to me because they mean the future of my children. When (there are) cuts ... the ones who suffer the most are the minorities, the low income people. This has really influenced my participation in school issues and voter registration drives. The school committee needs to know that there are people looking out for their children. And with voter registration, I strongly believe that the power is in the vote.
These activities are a priority to me because they mean the future of my children. I'm hoping that when they grow up Millville will be a place where everyone will be treated like equals, a time when education will be the priority of the city and that city government will learn the true meaning of quality education for everyone.

The influence of education politics and school funding has driven Beth Coffey's activities not only in the schools, but in the community as well. She remembers wheeling her six month old son around in a baby carriage as she urged voters to sign petitions in support of the schools. She has coordinated Proposition 2 1/2 override campaigns to secure more money for schools, written letters, made phone calls, testified before legislative and school committees, and worked on policy issues.

It's politics. ... the growth process and the empowerment that results once you become an involved parent (changes you). You grow personally, and as you become empowered, you just keep going along that road, because you know that's the way you're going to get the best education for your kid.

Strength in diversity/ anti-racism

The importance of knowing how to get along in a pluralistic society cannot be diminished. The demographics of this country are changing. The world itself has become smaller because of scientific discoveries. We learn about people and how to reject stereotypes by being immersed in a culture where people of a variety of ethnic, racial, and linguistic backgrounds have an opportunity to interact and know each other.

One of the strength's of Millville's schools is in their cultural diversity, according to the parents interviewed. Kay Cole states:
I think it’s important that my children know that everyone’s not White middle class - that the world is made up of all kinds of different people.

She became involved as an advocate for equal educational opportunity when her son became one of the fifteen plaintiffs in the McDuffy v. Robertson suit scheduled, after more than a decade, to be heard before the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court in an effort to correct the state-wide inequities in funding public schools based on a heavy reliance on the property tax.

Daniel Erklauer’s involvement is impacted by the culturally rich blend of the community.

... if you don’t respond to the racism and you don’t respond to the effects that has on the lack of educational resources, that does effect your kids if they’re Anglo kids. ...
In the next few years, the leadership majority in parent involvement is not going to be Anglo anymore, if we’re doing this right.

He cites examples of how parents became involved in issues beyond their own children, particularly because of the diverse population. The parents formed a task force to address the issue of dropouts in Millville’s schools, and even took their findings to the business community in an effort to highlight the economic drain on the tax base. Research by Nieto and Frau-Ramos (1992) indicates that the dropout rate among Puerto Rican youths in Millville in 1990 was sixty eight percent.

Parents became involved in the struggles for, in the words of Daniel Erklauer,

... the access to equal educational opportunity for students whose first language was Spanish ... making sure they had the same opportunities or resources.
Parents addressed the issues of school libraries, making sure that more library books were made available in Spanish.

Another concern that Mr. Erklauer spoke about as a critical issue was involving more Puerto Rican parents in activities. He pointed out that since the overwhelming majority of students in Millville’s schools were Puerto Rican, that in order for parent involvement to be effective it must involve parents of those students in activities. Networking, outreach, and coalition building are components of those efforts.

With many parents not conversant in the language of parent and school department meetings, parents insisted that there be access to written and oral translation. In addition, they insisted to the district that materials sent home from the school be translated into Spanish, a practice that had not been consistent until then, and they continued to monitor the implementation of that policy. Parents pushed for outreach workers and bilingual counselors. Mr. Erklauer spoke about the process for additions to schools which alleviated overcrowding and provided up-to-date facilities for instruction.

Puerto Rican parents were not involved in any of those processes, but in retrospect, what we were really doing was fighting for new schools and additions to schools which would be used and utilized by a majority of Puerto Rican students.

Mr. Erklauer continued further to say that if the community does not deal with the issues of racism, then his children are negatively impacted. He describes that attitude as one of shortsightedness. He celebrates the diversity of the school system and states quite simply:
I don’t want to live in a community that looks like the color of milk.

When parents brought suit against the Millville Public Schools in an effort to desegregate the schools and won, more money came into the community, and creativity among teachers was unleashed, according to Eduardo Rodriguez. Children would learn at a very early age that stereotypes and myths were not true.

On the issue of failed overrides, Kate Lee believes that some of the negative votes were racist.

I think [the tensions of living in a diverse community] plays into it tremendously. I think if they were White, middle class children attending the public schools that the override probably would have passed. I think that the kids are misunderstood, that their family situations are misunderstood by the voting population. I think they all forgot where they came from ... that they don’t see the connection between not educating these kids and what it’s going to cost in the future versus paying for it now in a positive way.

María Sanchez, a native of Puerto Rico, points out that many Puerto Rican parents are trusting of the school administration and teachers; that if they are told by the school that money is not available to buy books or such, then the parents will take that at face value. It would probably not occur to them that politics enters into that decision. She also points out that parent meetings are not a priority to her constituency. McLaughlin and Shields (1987) found that low income parents are less likely to be willing to serve on councils where they serve in unsubstantive roles.

These two facts impact parent involvement in a negative sense. When the Puerto Rican adult population, with a greater percentage of children in the public schools than the norm, is not actively
engaged in budgetary, policy, and curricular decisions, then the decisions which impact their sons and daughters are made by people who have little or no interest in the future or well being of minority children.

Commitment to high quality and equitable education

Because the parents in this case study have all been involved in political matters which go far beyond impacting the education of their own child, their influence has had a positive impact on the education of the Millville community. They have created and served on task forces and committees which have impacted policies on dropout prevention, bilingual education, redistricting, schools of choice, school construction, homework policies, library upgrading, health issues, retention and promotion, whole language, and the reformation of junior high schools to those with a middle school philosophy. Kay Cole pointed out:

When there was a concern about how emergency aid [money] was being spent, parents called in the state and they did question some expenditures.

Some parents were being asked, she pointed out, to pay for after school programs which traditionally had been supported as part of voluntary efforts to desegregate the schools.

We felt that that couldn't happen. It made a division between parents - the haves and have nots.

One of Kay Cole's earliest leadership activities was concerning the matter of overcrowding at Powell Avenue School. Original plans by administration to put bilingual and special education classes in
the basement were scrapped when parents used persuasive measures, and portable classrooms were rented instead.

I realized that money was tight at that point, but we had a right to ask for decent, safe space for our children to learn in. And when a suggestion was made at one point that our kids wouldn’t be there, I became more concerned because all these kids were in school together and no child should be in a basement with mold and termites and dark ... it’s hard for them and they shouldn’t be there. Never mind just my child. I realized at that point that I was not in it just for my child. I was concerned about education in this city.

An issue of concern to Kay Cole, Daniel Erklauer, and Kate Lee is the right of parents to be involved in the selection of principals and other administrators. Since their children are the ones who will be directly impacted by the practices and policies of the appointee, they believe they have a right to input, a right they had until quite recently. Kay Cole shares her frustrations.

I don’t think they [the school committee] want to share any power. But we don’t want any power from them ... we are a powerful enough group on our own.

The district is beginning a search for a new top administrator. Daniel Erklauer reflects

It’s unthinkable to me, for instance, that there’s a search that’s supposed to be conducted for superintendent and there’s no parental input as far as I can see. If this was four or five years ago, there would probably have been three or four parents on the search committee to figure out how to replace him. Now, if we get one it will be a miracle.

When Beth Coffey reflects on district wide issues, she ties them to the national agenda.

The long range hope I have for my country and my children is that no matter where you went in the United States, if you were in public school, you would be getting the best education you could. You cannot do that now.
... I know that we have other problems like the deficit, but it's almost like we're turning down the volume on the voices of those children who are desperately seeking and who are entitled to a quality public education.

If parents do not respond to curriculum cuts and program cuts and the lack of educational resources, then all children will be affected, according to Erklauer, not only their own children.

Whether you immediately see [program cuts] or not, the result of not dealing with the thinking that you can marginalize the Millville schools and the kids in them just because the majority of the kids aren't White, then your kids are effected.

When Eduardo Rodriguez ran for the school committee he never expected to win. He placed his name in nomination to be able to raise issues of importance to minority children in particular. He raised concerns about the lack of role models in the schools and in texts, about tracking, and about the relevancy of the curriculum to Latino and African American youth in particular.

I've never seen [involvement] as kind of this personal thing of "I'm doing this for my kids." I'm looking ... at it more in terms of justice and not "what am I going to get out of it."

Kate Lee talked about children with special needs in her interview. Neither of her children required special services, yet she recognized that the district was filled with children on whom money invested was money well spent.

I think that the communities that directly surround ours don't have the same kind of kids. The children in the school system here don't always have proper medical care or enough knowledge about drugs, alcohol, sex education, AIDS; there are children who come from families where there are drug users. And unless those kids are given the kind of information that they need, then they can't make proper decisions. They need a lot of support ... an education beyond reading and writing that could save somebody's life.
For all the children

Massachusetts House Education Committee Chairman Mark Roosevelt has articulated what many have know to be true of children and their powerlessness to influence politicians. "It's unfortunate that kids don't have an organized lobby of adults with their sole interests in mind." (Garvey, 1993). They are powerless to do much to change their fate, and often unaware of the political decisions that affect their lives. In Millville, it appears the issues of children and their education are put on a back burner while politicians and the public address things that, in the end, will have little positive impact on the quality of education that children receive. This is true not just in Millville, but at the national level as well.

Beth Coffey has moved her family from Millville to an eastern Massachusetts community in order to find a public school system that she feels comfortable with.

We need to make kids a priority in this country, and they're not now. It's more of a leadership issue at the national level, and somebody has to come along and set the tone and say "kids are important."

...I'm angry about the fact that the kids I know in Millville ... can't get the same kind of education that my kids are going to get next year.

... This community has closed its eyes and ears to the children who live here.

When Eduardo Rodriguez tries to make sense of the lack of commitment to children on the part of the Millville community, he places the blame squarely at Ronald Reagan's feet. He believes that at the local level they are experiencing a reactionary period, where people are critical of the school system because they do not feel committed to it. He also believes that current elected officials are not there to determine what is best for children, but to slash budgets.
I see it happening all over the country. It’s not just Millville. In the last twelve years, people have felt that it was OK to be self centered. That it was OK not to do for other people. That it was OK to be critical of people who had less than them. And from Washington, through Ronald Reagan, he said it was OK to undo that social commitment to people. It was OK for government not to be involved with fair housing and education because it should be laissez-faire. And that attitude has been incorporated into a lot of people’s way of thinking so that at the local level we have people now who are in control in the school system who think that way.

Kate Lee’s first indoctrination into parent involvement was largely political. She was part of a group of parents who struggled to keep their neighborhood school open.

I think our children’s right to a quality, equitable education is in jeopardy, and we need to make sure that they get the education that they are entitled to, that every other generation has had in the past, and that it is part of their constitutional right to have a public education.

The issue of racism cannot be ignored in Millville’s schools. Many believe that children are being short changed because the schools are largely minority. María Sanchez emotionally tells a story of a young girl who needed special services.

This girl was waiting. She didn’t hear good. The school was supposed to provide something to help her hear better in the classroom. She was waiting for the whole year... I know that if anyone else [non minority] had the same problem it would have been there like right away.

Overcoming barriers

The parents who have been interviewed for this study have not allowed politics or outside forces to stand in the way of their struggle for quality, equal educational opportunities for their children. They have supported each other and helped to provide forums and
opportunities for the expansion of parent involvement in governance activities in Millville’s schools. In order to overcome barriers, some of which have seemingly been deliberately placed in front of them, they have searched for answers, formulated responses, and in short, have done their homework in an effort to leap over those obstacles.

The efforts to improve and support Millville’s schools has been utmost in the activities of the parents in this study. Beth Coffey looks back with frustration on the many creative educational ventures that occurred in Millville. She points to the lack of credit for the innovative middle school, the creation of a new technical high school, and the additions to elementary schools as examples of projects the community ought to be proud of.

This community has not supported all the good things that have occurred in the schools that have been brought about by the administration, by individual teachers within individual classrooms.

She spoke at length about the frustrations brought on by politics.

[The students] should have just as much right to sixteen kids in their class, to a drama teacher, to doing three plays a year, to having gym twice a week, to having adequate supplies and materials, to having a library that has adequate resources and books. It makes me angry that that’s not the right of every child in America. It should be. Governor Weld is sending his children off to Scruffy Neck, or wherever his children go, or George Bush talking about how he wants vouchers for private education and parochial schools ... it’s widening the gap between the haves and the have nots. It’s creating a climate in America where there will be no hope for kids.

Politics creeps into the frustrations of Daniel Erklauer. He reflects on the countless hours spent trying to convince people to invest in the future of this country.

If I look back on all the energy that we’ve had to expend on all the trips people made to Boston, and all the lobbying of
legislatures, and all the money that was raised to try to get overrides passed and all those activities ... if we could have taken all that energy and could have been involved in working with teachers in delivering educational services to kids, the impact would have been phenomenal.

Kate Lee agrees. Her involvement in the schools, though many times proactive, has been reactive on budgetary issues since she first became involved.

From day one I was always battling the budget, so I don’t know if it changed my involvement, but I think it changed the direction parent involvement went. I think it prevented parents from putting all their energies into working with the kids and the teachers, and we were forced to spend what little time we had always battling for money, lobbying different levels of government for funding.

... It’s so frustrating right now working with a board who doesn’t listen (to parents) and doesn’t care, and isn’t going to react to what parents want.

... It’s taken a lot of clout out of parent power or parent involvement.

Daniel Erklauer speaks of the frustration of trying to hold onto gains that parents were involved in, and how positively energizing the activities used to be for them, because they saw positive results.

Everything now is trying to keep from having something taken away. It’s very depressing in that sense. It’s hard to get energy from that.

Continuous involvement

Seven years have passed since the parents wrote the Parent Involvement policy for Millville, and of the five who still live in the community, all remain active. The continuity of leadership has been extremely important for their movement. It has provided their organization with a sense of history, a culture of their own. They have persevered for more than a decade in their efforts to improve and support the schools and continue to do so.
Mrs. Lee's children have graduated from the schools, yet she continues to be involved.

I felt I couldn't walk out on the other parents who I’ve become friends with, who’ve kept their kids in the schools, whose kids I care about ... I just couldn’t walk away from them. I don’t think they need me or anything like that, I just really felt that I wanted other people to lobby for my kids ... and I used to say that these kids are the future of the community, even though they are not your biological child, it’s the future of the community, and this year I had to prove that that was what I really believed in.

Kay Cole wonders sometimes why she has been able to sustain her efforts to support the schools.

Can I sit back and do nothing? At least I can say to myself “I tried.” I supported the teachers, I supported the principals, I supported quality education in this community. I supported who I think were candidates for school committee who cared about quality education for all kids. Who didn’t come, for the most part, with hidden agendas, who felt that education was a way out of poverty for a lot of these kids. That’s why I stayed involved.

Eduardo Rodriguez continues to be involved because he sees it as an issue of empowerment.

It’s an issue that people who are at the bottom of the ladder can have their needs met by the powers that be - the people who control the political process.... We need to change. It just doesn’t feel just to me that some kids are just shut out because of where they are from or their ethnic background or that they live in a certain geographic area of the city. So that’s my reason ... you need to open up the system. It’s an issue of empowerment.

Beth Coffey states quite explicitly that she continues to be involved in the schools because of her children. Well able to afford private education, she cites issues of cultural diversity among the most important for her children to experience. She believes that the times themselves have created new avenues of involvement for her.
When she first became involved, school based management was not commonplace. She feels empowered now and knows that she will continue to “spread the word,” because parent involvement works. Coffey will still be involved in the schools, no matter where she lives, because she believes that her children will best be educated in that type of setting. She views private schools as elitist and exclusionary.

I think that public education in the United States should be for everybody. It shouldn’t be just for the poor kids, or the kids who can’t speak English very well, or for the people who can’t afford to do private school ... It should be of such an exceptional quality that everyone would want to go there.

Daniel Erklauer continues his involvement for a number of reasons. He cites his family background and the value his parents placed on education, as well as the deep commitment he has to his own children. He is from the mold where it is not enough to find fault with something and to complain about it; he believes that he must do something positive to change what he believes does not measure up. Involvement in issues, whether that is community or union politics, is part of what he is. Erklauer believes that people should have a say in their future, and the way to do that is through education.

Mr. Erklauer speaks about conservative trends in America and the Reagan and Bush years, and believes that he and many parents in Millville would likely be involved in voter registration drives in Mississippi and integrating the schools in Selma, Alabama if fate had not brought them here.

I just think that there’s a core ... of good people everywhere. And people have stayed involved and are doing this because they know they are right.

... I think most of the people have some kind of inner belief system, something that grounds them ....
Maria Sanchez will continue to be involved in Millville’s schools for years to some.

These activities are a priority to me because they mean the future of my children. I’m hoping that when they grow up Millville will be a place where everyone will be treated like equals, a time where education will be a priority of the city and that city government will learn the true meaning of quality education for everyone.

**Conclusion**

Parents in Millville have been involved in their schools in a variety of ways, but the activities of Kay, Kate, Eduardo, María, Daniel, and Beth have been explicitly political. Their involvement has included lobbying, letter writing, written and oral testimony before board and legislative bodies; they have marched, picketed, organized override campaigns, and run for office. Their activities have had a direct impact on the way schools are governed in Millville.

The next chapter will focus on the historical overview of Proposition 2 1/2 and its specific implications for education including the elimination of fiscal autonomy; the proviso that the mayor chair the school committee; the limitation on the amount a community could raise in taxes in a given year to 2.5 percent of the full and fair cash valuation of the previous year’s assessment; the establishment of an override mechanism; and the requirement that the state finance any future mandates. The interviews with Kate, Beth, Eduardo, Daniel, María and Kay will provide me with data to place the involvement of Millville’s parents in context with the activities of parents as a result of Proposition 2 1/2.
CHAPTER VI
IMPACT OF PROPOSITION 2 1/2 ON MILLVILLE'S SCHOOLS

A review of the literature in parent involvement in Chapter II provided an overview of the types of activities parents engage in as part of their commitment to schools. In addition, the Chapter II review of literature on school financing and school politics over the past decade, of government documents on taxation, of advocacy document and legal briefs filed with the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court over the implementation of Proposition 2 1/2 as it relates to school funding, provided additional data which allowed the particular involvement of the parents in the case studies to be placed in historical perspective. Since this study explores the impact of local and state politics on parent involvement, analyzes the effects of a decade of school debates on parent involvement, reviews the issues of parents catapulted into the political arena as they try to positively impact the kind of education their children receive and assesses the impact of parental involvement on the political process, it is important to place the activities of the parents in the case studies in Chapter IV in an historical context and to illustrate how the political activities within the Commonwealth affected their involvement.

In this chapter I will provide an historical overview of Proposition 2 1/2 and outline what measures of Proposition 2 1/2 directly impacted the schools and school financing. The elimination of fiscal autonomy, the addition of the mayor as chair of the school committee, the 2.5 percent limit on property taxes, the option to override Proposition 2 1/2,
and the funding of future mandates by the state are aspects of the law which will be explored.

Historical Overview of Proposition 2 1/2

On November 4, 1980 the voters of Massachusetts went to the polls and passed an initiative petition which changed the face of school financing in a dramatic way. The passage of an act known as Proposition 2 1/2 was a tax revolution of sorts, the first major one in Massachusetts since the Boston Tea Party (Raimondo, 1987, Green, 1980). Proposition 2 1/2 severely restricts the ability of local communities to raise taxes for local services. Proponents of the petition told voters that the state had enormous amounts of money which could be used to offset local cuts. Voters, in their ire over local taxation, attempted to shift the centuries old practice of using the property tax to finance public services, especially education, to the state level (Ladd & Wilson, 1981). While it was true that Massachusetts was experiencing a period of growth and expansion, economists predicted that it would not last (Sitzer, Flanagan & Karvellis, 1981). Further, nowhere in the measure was there a provision for the state to assume the burden of funding.

The term “Proposition 2 1/2” is a colloquialism. The word “proposition” comes from the well known 1978 California tax cutting measure, Proposition 13. In California, issues put before the electorate for a popular vote are known as propositions. In Massachusetts, they are simply known as questions. In actuality, what we commonly refer to as Proposition 2 1/2 is an amendment to Chapter 580, § 1 of the
General Laws of Massachusetts, and is entitled “An Act Limiting State and Local Taxation and Expenditures.”

The reference to “2 1/2” is not based on an irregular numbering system. It was actually the second question on the ballot, which caused some confusion at the polls as voters looked for Question 2 1/2 rather than Question 2. The reference to “2 1/2” is to the restriction which required that the total annual assessments of cities and towns could only be “2 1/2 percent” of the fair market value of that property (Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, 1981).

Proposition 2 1/2 was a complicated initiative petition. According to Ladd and Wilson (1981), sixty five percent of the voters surveyed believed that their services would be better if their taxes were cut, and almost eighty percent wanted the burden of education funding shifted from the local property base to the state. Myth became fact, and sixty percent of the voters pulled a lever to have their taxes reduced. School budgets were slashed, schools were closed and teachers were laid off; many never to return. Eventually the state provided some relief, but the damage was done. While some of the provisions of the act were not directly related to schools, all had impacts that in the end affected funding at the local and state level. The most dramatic changes on schools and the way they were governed was the inclusion in the act of the following five provisions:

- elimination of fiscal autonomy;
- provision that the mayor chair the school committee;
- limitation on the amount a community could raise in taxes in a given year to 2.5 percent of the full and fair cash valuation of the previous year’s assessment;
establishment of an override mechanism;
• requirement that the state finance any future mandates.

As voters and taxpayers, parents became more engaged in the political process. Their most precious possession, their children, were becoming pawns in a political game; parents were not happy. School budgets were slashed, programmatic decisions which effected their children became more political. Parents, it seemed, were willing to do whatever it took to protect the interests of their child, even if that meant engaging in activities which had been previously outside their realm of experience or interest.

In the following section I will explain what the significance has been to schools in Massachusetts, and to Millville in particular, of these five provisions: elimination of fiscal autonomy; the mayor as chair of the school committee; the limitation on property taxes; the establishment of an override mechanism; and the requirement that the state finance any future mandates.

School Related Proposition 2 1/2 Provisions

Elimination of fiscal autonomy

Prior to the implementation of Proposition 2 1/2, it was the function and responsibility of school committees in Massachusetts to determine what programs and services were necessary to educate the children of the community, and to establish a budget to provide those services. School committees had “fiscal autonomy,” the total and final say for the amount of money needed to run the schools. Voters had
previously exerted some control over the school committee through the
election of its members, and it was unclear whether or not voters would have more control over funds now that the city council was the appropriating body. Eighty six percent of the supporters of Proposition 2 1/2 believed that they would have more control over school department budgets with the city council as the final authority (Ladd & Wilson, 1981).

The language of the initiative petition stated:

... the proposal would limit the amount of money required to be appropriated for public schools to that amount voted upon by the local appropriating authority. (Massachusetts General Laws St. 1980, c. 580.)

What that meant, in simple laymen's terms, was that fiscal autonomy was no longer the prerogative of the school committee, but that of the city council. The Massachusetts Teachers Association et al. argued unsuccessfully before the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court that the local appropriating body was the school committee (North Eastern Reporter, 1981).

No longer could a school committee send a budget to the mayor for his or her signature, and then on to the appropriating body, either the town meeting, or in the case of Millville, to the city council. In the past, the mayor and city council could make all sorts of political noise, either before or after the school budget was established, to encourage the school committee to live within certain fiscal limits. They could play all the normal political games and attempt to bring all sorts of pressure to bear on the school committee, but in the end, could do nothing to change the amount that the school committee was requesting of the community. With the elimination of fiscal autonomy, all that changed.
While the school committee still had the fiscal responsibility for line items within the school department budget, the allocation for the entire budget was determined by the mayor. The school committee, the elected body entrusted with operating the schools, was no longer able to determine how much money was needed to provide an equitable educational opportunity for children. The mayor was the sole determiner of the school department budget. The city council, which received the school department budget for a final vote, was now only able to cut the budget rather than add to it as was the case prior to January, 1981.

Kate Lee spoke about the loss of fiscal autonomy.

I was raised to believe that we were responsible to provide a quality education for all of our children. And with the loss of fiscal autonomy I really began to doubt how that was all going to happen, and who decides how much money it takes to educate a kid. When you have different kinds of kids with different kinds of problems, you can’t put a price tag on what their education is going to cost.

With the loss of fiscal autonomy, the landscape of collective bargaining changed. Not only were school department unions coming to the table with school committees and their agents, but they were required to pass the approval for funding a contract by the city council and the mayor as well.

The lobbying and public relations efforts of parents were brought to the forefront. In order to protect the interests of their children, and to place the interests of public schools ahead of the interests of other municipal departments, many parents in Millville engaged in aggressive lobbying campaigns. They contacted the mayor in an effort to squeeze as much money as possible from him before he set a dollar amount for the school committee. They then lobbied the school
committee in an effort to have the resources allocated where parents thought best. After the school committee voted on a budget, parents lobbied the city council to gain their support for the budget. In the meantime, they were in touch with legislators and the governor in an effort to increase local aid (cherry sheet) money, as well as Equal Educational Opportunity Grant (EEOG) money. Once funds were received by the city from those two sources, parents in Millville continued their lobbying efforts to assure that local appropriations for schools would not be decreased, an action that was more than a possibility in Millville. According to Kay Cole

... the state aid that came back to this community was not earmarked for education ... I think we've had politicians who have been able to keep our property taxes very low ... by using some of that money for police, fire, DPW ... Politically that was very good for them; they were able to be reelected year after year after year because they kept taxes low.

It was a tiresome game, and one many parents were not comfortable with. What many parents wanted to do was engage in activities in their children's school. Politics, lobbying, and pressuring public officials were foreign to so many of them. Daniel Erklauer states

... Because of the historical circumstance, we spend more time whining about what is going on in Boston, than taking that set of new parents and other parents and really trying to figure out how to work with them to keep them involved.

Instead of having the luxury of time to recruit parents, assist them through training activities, and to spend time working in the buildings and in their child's classroom, parents were forced to concentrate on political activities to ensure that their children were receiving an equitable education.
The mayor as chair of the school committee

The school committee is a body elected to set policy and establish a budget for the public schools within the Commonwealth. With the passage of Proposition 2 1/2 the mayor became the *de facto* head of that body. This was a dramatic political and philosophical change. The mayor is elected as the chief financial officer of the city. His interests are far broader than those of the schools. With a very different constituency to answer to, the mayor often places police and fire protection and trash collection before the interests of children.

When the mayor's constituency is far removed from the age and ethnicity of the schools, conflict arises, as is the case in Millville. The mayor and the school committee had been at odds for years about school department expenditures, and disaster for the schools was imminent. If the schools received the lion's share of the municipal budget, residents pondered what would happen to the rest of their services. A fever of panic and racism ran through the Millville community; the elderly, a strong voting block within the community, feared that they would not be safe to leave their homes at night. Fires, which were not uncommon in the largely older, Puerto Rican neighborhoods, would allegedly spread unchecked to other areas of the community. Gangs of Puerto Rican youth would supposedly be able to roam the streets. Drug dealers would allegedly relocate from New York City to the corners of Millville. The elderly feared loss of their social programs in order to fund schools where the majority of children neither looked like nor spoke like the children these adults were familiar with. The mayor had fanned these fires of racism and fear in an effort to keep the school department in check before the passage of
Proposition 2 \( \frac{1}{2} \). He now had a firm hold on the purse strings, and he exerted his influence at school committee meetings as well.

Kay Cole recounts

> We had a mayor who was chair of the school committee, which I think is a real conflict of interest. ... There was always a priority for public safety in appropriations - police, fire, DPW ... this last round of White flight was due more to perception ... [the] mayor... stood up two years ago and said we had lots of money in the school department ... And because he was a business man, the people on the street thought he was telling the truth. He's been proven wrong, but it didn't help.

2.5 percent limit on property taxes

When Proposition 2 \( \frac{1}{2} \) passed, the language of the act severely restricted the ability of cities and towns to raise money for local public services by at least fifteen percent per year until they reached the maximum allowable amount of \( 2 \frac{1}{2} \) percent of the full cash value of the community (Ladd & Wilson, 1981). The city of Millville, along with most communities its size or larger, had to reduce taxation by fifteen percent in the first year. Unlike the state of California, which had a large state surplus when Proposition 13 was enacted, Massachusetts had no such cushion. Local services were devastated. Employees were laid off, services curtailed, schools closed. In Millville alone, two of its twelve elementary schools were closed forever.

In 1980, fifty percent of local revenue in Massachusetts came from the property tax, while the average for the rest of the nation was twenty eight percent. In 1981, the first year of the enactment of Proposition 2 \( \frac{1}{2} \), it dropped to forty percent (Bradbury, Ladd & Christopher 1982). The result of Proposition 2 \( \frac{1}{2} \) was clearly undesirable: the ability of small, wealthy districts to raise twice as
much revenue from property taxes as resource-poor communities such as Millville increased the disparity of the playing fields in Massachusetts schools even further. Communities with the highest levels of per-pupil expenditures before the passage of Proposition 2 1/2 had to make the smallest cuts. Parents quickly saw that the children in Millville were to be further punished because of an accident of birth, the accident of being born into a community lacking in resources to provide them with a quality public education.

The ability to override Proposition 2 1/2

Voters had the ability, through the passage of Proposition 2 1/2, to vote to reduce the statutory limit on taxation to a rate below 2 1/2 percent if two-thirds of the voters approved. This was not mentioned in the summary of the initiative petition by the Attorney General's office, and the Massachusetts Teachers Association argued before the Massachusetts Supreme Court that the omission was important (North East Reporter, 1981). The court did not agree. Parents of public school children in Massachusetts have been fortunate in that to date no underride questions have been proposed.

In order for an override question to be placed before the voters, the city council would have to agree to place the following question or questions on the ballot. The vote could be taken at a regular election, or a special election could be held.

The local appropriating authority of any city or town which is subject to the provisions of paragraph (d) may, by two-thirds vote*, seek voter approval to assess in excess of the amount allowed pursuant to said paragraph (d) by a specified amount. Any question submitted to the voters shall be worded as follows: –
“Shall the (city/town) of________be allowed to assess an additional $____ in real estate and personal property taxes for the fiscal year beginning July first, nineteen hundred and ____?

YES_____ NO_____.”


* later amended to a simple majority

Upon approval of the city council, the question was forwarded to the state legislature for their approval. The question could be for a specific dollar amount to cover a number of municipal services, in a case where the community was simply in debt, or for a specific department, or for a specific item such as a fire truck.

On the ability to override Proposition 2 1/2, Millville parents have not met with much success. Millville voters have twice had the question placed before them, once in a general form, with all services linked, and another in a “menu” format, where voters were able to pick and choose. Trash collection won out over the schools, as did every other question including police, fire, the war memorial, and the council on aging.

These actions occurred despite the fact that in Millville, parents were among the most active in both override campaigns. They formed coalitions with teacher and citizen groups, held pizza parties and bowl-a-thons for fundraisers, wrote letters to the editor, published position papers, went door to door, appeared at public forums in great numbers and spoke about the importance of the public schools, and lobbied local politicians in an effort to get them to support the override questions. They held signs on street corners and in front of the polling places. One of the most active parents agreed to organize the override efforts for the mayor. They were harassed, threatened, sworn at, and given vulgar gestures from passing motorists, and even went into debt. Members of
the community called the local newspaper, anonymously, and attacked the schools and its administration for catering to the wishes of "those minorities." In the final hour of defeat, parents believed that the vote was racist, and that no manner of rational thought would have changed the vote.

Beth Coffey reflected on her involvement in politics through override activities.

... the community was a large part of the picture and that we needed to address that and that's why I got involved with the mayor in the first and second overrides. ... if we didn't have a good public school system then people would not move into this community. There would be an exodus. And I felt very strongly about that.

Future mandates to be funded by the state

The electorate was irate that the Massachusetts legislature passed laws requiring programs for the schools which were not fully funded by the state, thus leaving the burden of financing those programs to the local communities through property taxes. Special Education and Bilingual Education were two such programs. The spiraling and uncontrollable costs of special education in particular caused many districts hardship. The cost for outside placement of even one child might exceed $70,000. This frustration led the proponents of Proposition 2 1/2 to require that henceforth when the legislature imposed mandates on school districts that such mandates would be fully funded.

In a community where politics plays such an important role in the education of young people, this is a two edged sword. Mandates without funding are difficult for a financially strapped community to
absorb. However, it is unlikely that Millville would have implemented a bilingual education program, funded or not, had it not been required by the state. Without progressive legislation which would change the way children are taught and require certain minimal standards, it is unlikely that Millville’s children would be given the same advantages as communities where the tax base can afford progressive programs which would enrich and stimulate the lives of its school population.

Conclusion

Parents in Millville have participated in schools for a variety of reasons, many of which have been political. Their involvement has not only been for the benefit of their own children, but for the diverse community at large. They have engaged in activities from tutoring in individual classrooms to testifying before legislative bodies and lobbying their United States Congressional delegation. Their activities have ranged from the most parochial to the broadest in scope. As has become clear in this chapter, the climate of the last decade has had a profound influence on the types of activities that parents engage in. The passage of Proposition 2 1/2 has forever changed the manner in which parents interact with elected decision makers. Politicians, elected by a constituency the majority of whom no longer have children in public schools, often vote with reelection in mind rather than what is best for children. Parents have moved to the forefront in an effort to secure quality educational opportunities for their children and other children in the community. They understand that when the public
schools work for everyone, not just the children of the elite, the entire community benefits.

Although early experiences in parent involvement for many parents consisted of fundraising and classroom activities, the political winds of the past decade have caused a shift in priorities for parents. If need be, parents have articulated through their interviews that they would raise funds and participate in classroom activities if need be, but they believe much more needs to be done on the political front to secure funding and to ensure that programs are not cut in favor of lower taxes. They understand that without their political activities many elected officials will answer to that other constituency, the one with no children in public schools. Parents continue to be politically involved because they know that their involvement will have a positive impact on the way schools are funded and governed.

In the next chapter I will draw conclusions based on the research and make recommendations, as well as provide recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

"Parent Involvement in a Post Proposition 2 1/2 Era: The Effects of Politics and Education Funding on Parent Involvement in an Urban Setting" was a study that focused on the impact of politics in the last decade on parent activities in a small, urban community in western Massachusetts. Parents in Millville had participated in a decade of funding battles, override activities, and political campaigns. Their activities had moved from the traditional bake sale to those which were explicitly political such as participating in override campaigns, lobbying local, state, and national officials, running for elective office, and serving on district wide and community task forces which addressed any number of educational and funding issues.

A review of the literature showed that other studies conducted about parent involvement activities were more home-, classroom-, and individual school-based in nature. Some studied the impact of types of parent involvement on individual student achievement; others surveyed the impact of home-school communication on the type of involvement in which parents participated. This particular study specifically assessed the political activities of six parents in Millville through case studies.

In this final chapter I will review the implications of this study and why it was important, make recommendations for further
research based on the conclusions from the data, and provide a summary statement.

Implications

Implications or conclusions can be drawn from the data which reveal the kinds of political activities some parents have been involved in and what support systems can be established to assist parents as they work to support the schools of the Commonwealth through political activities. In the following section I will discuss the implications for policy, resources, training, and monitoring.

Parent involvement activities have evolved in many forms in the Millville Public Schools, all of which reflect current national models in parent involvement (Henderson, 1986). However, while Millville has had a comprehensive parent involvement plan, what made Millville special was not only the document which provided a framework for parent involvement which ensured that parents would govern themselves, but that the policy provided administrative and school committee support and the resources to allow the plan to work. The language of Millville's policy lends credibility to the governance activities of parents, but without resources from the district it is difficult to implement those activities. Without monitoring by both parents and staff and without training opportunities which will allow parents to grow, segments of the parent organizations are apt to float aimlessly along, through deliberate action on the part of politicians and administrators who want to have no part of brokering with parents on their own turf.
Millville’s parents have utilized their connectedness through their parent organizations and have moved themselves beyond the roles of partner, collaborator, audience, and supporters (Henderson, 1986). The actions of parents have become more and more political. Their actions have been deliberate and aggressive as they have attempted to assist the district in providing a high quality, equal educational opportunity for their children and the other children in the district as well.

The Passage of Proposition 2 1/2 has changed the way Millville’s parents have been involved in their schools. The parents interviewed for the case studies indicated that their initial expectations for involvement were very different from the activities they find themselves engaged in now. What they thought would be time spent in their child’s classroom and assisting their child’s teacher became time spent in meetings and in board rooms, on the telephone to elected officials, or on buses to Boston in an effort to impact the type of education their child would receive. The times and politics have caused them to change. We can never know whether the parents in the case study would have become political if there had been no passage of Proposition 2 1/2. We do know that their activities as parents were expressly political, and it is unlikely that they would have been as political if Proposition 2 1/2 had not passed. The limitation on the local property tax and the pitting of one group against another for a larger piece of an ever shrinking pie has changed the way parents have been and must continue to be involved in the schools forever.
From this study we have learned that some parents are not shy and reluctant to be involved in whatever manner is required to protect the interests of their children. We have learned from the parents themselves that support in the form of staff and financial resources from the district itself has a positive impact on the ways in which parents are involved in the schools. We have learned that their commitment to the public schools goes beyond the interests of their own children; that parents must become even more political in their focus in order to assure that spending is adequate for public schools and that politicians take positions on issues which will affect children in a positive way. We have learned that in a community where racist attitudes and practices sometimes effect decisions that are made, the activities of parents, particularly those whose children will be most negatively affected, can preserve programs and policies which will positively impact all children.

Parents in Millville have participated in grassroots organizing, have learned how to network with parents within the district and with parents from surrounding communities as well.

Parents are partners in the education of children. It is not the charge of a school district alone to prepare a child to become a happy, productive, successful member of society. The basis for that foundation is laid long before a child enters school. Parents, schools, and government bodies must work together to provide options for the young people of this nation. Time and effort invested in developing ways for parents and politicians to work together would ensure that teachers would be able to teach and that children would be able to learn in an atmosphere devoid of uncertainty and antagonism.
Recommendations Based on the Study

The involvement of parents in public schools is an issue that concerns educators, citizens, and politicians. Task forces established from the federal government to the local level cite the importance of an involved, informed parent body; moving from a desire to have parents more involved to the implementation of such a recommendation takes time, effort, and resources.

A task force convened by the Massachusetts Department of Education could be charged with studying the implications of developing long range strategies for expanding school governance to include parents, elected officials, staff, and members of the community. Full funding for the completion of such a task as well as support from the legislature would ensure that parent involvement implications were taken seriously.

The Massachusetts Legislature might convene a task force to consider the implications of a decade of parent involvement as a result of Proposition 2 1/2 on school and local politics. The battles over funding and allocation are tearing away at the very fiber of our communities and putting children, who should be guarded and protected by the Commonwealth, in the back seat. Issues might arise which could cause the legislature to rethink the way they respond to issues of Proposition 2 1/2 as it relates to schools and school funding. Perhaps agreements could be made to change the implementation of the act which would allow parents more time to spend with their
children and in individual schools rather than lobbying legislators and local elected officials.

The Massachusetts Teachers Association and/or the Massachusetts Federation of Teachers could consider the positive potential of networking with parents in a more formal way. The MTA and/or MFT might establish a task force of members and parents, including the Massachusetts PTA, who would make recommendations for local teachers associations and parent groups for coalition building and mutual support. The MTA, MFT and MPTA could publish a guidebook for such organizing and support. In addition, those organizations could forward their recommendations to the National Education Association, American Federation of Teachers, and the National PTA.

The community of Millville may consider the implications of developing a strategy which would allow for more site based management of its schools, provide for a broader base of parent and citizen input for the schools, and establish mutually acceptable ways for parents to be more involved in decision making without taking away the authority of the school committee. The strategy could consider how parent involvement is connected to the central mission of the district, and how parents could be included in the process of assessment of such a plan. If the question “how does this help the children?” cannot be answered, then perhaps it is time to consider different strategies.

Communities which have no plan for organized parent involvement could address the implications of establishing policies which provide parents with support to assist them in governing the
schools and becoming more involved in the life of the school. The plan might be connected to the central mission of the school, of educating each child to his or her fullest potential. The plan should be culturally sensitive and include specific plans for involving minority parents in particular. If plans are drafted which rely on traditional practices of involving parents in school activities, then only parents who traditionally participate will continue to do so.

Communities where school committees and central administration are committed to meaningful parent involvement beyond the scope of bake sales and lunch mothers might consider rewarding administrators for innovative techniques and programs which enhance and stimulate a variety of parent involvement programs.

Colleges and universities which engage in the business of educating the future teachers and administrators of this nation could pursue the possibilities of offering courses in the area of parent and community involvement.

Suggestions for Future Research

The data unearthed for this study provide us with an overview of the political activities of parents in one community in Massachusetts. It is important that the research on parent involvement in the political arena not stop here. The data indicate that parents will continue to be involved in helping to craft decisions made for and about the public schools through the political process. The data further indicate that this is an area of involvement which many
parents had not thought to be engaged; the data indicate that parents will continue to be involved politically because of the impact it has on so many children.

Future research could focus on the following areas:

- the achievement of individual students whose parents are politically active;
- the perception of members of the community of the political activities of parents;
- the perception of teachers and teacher associations of the political activities of parents;
- funding patterns in districts with a politically active parent body;
- the impact of parent involvement on political campaigns;
- the implications of political parental activity on district policies;
- the number and frequency of political decisions that parents make on a regular basis which impact the schools.

In communities of more affluence, research might focus on the subtle ways in which parents influence decision makers through their social connections. In those same communities research might focus on the kinds of issues parents lobby for and whether those issues are considered basics or extras by those parents. Research might focus on the ways parents are treated and how much influence they perceive they have on politicians who make decisions about school programs and funding.

The implications for parent involvement in the political arena are never ending. Communities of varying socioeconomic status
might have dramatically different reasons for parent involvement and might have varying ways that parents have approached the issue of securing what they consider to be the best possible education for their children.

**Conclusion**

The political involvement of parents in Millville has influenced the manner in which administrators and elected officials have determined and implemented policy and budgetary decisions in that community over the last decade since the passage of Proposition 2 1/2. Children might have been relegated to damp, moldy basement classroom spaces at Powell Avenue School had parents not lobbied and insisted on up-to-date portable classrooms. Additions to outdated, overcrowded schools might not have been secured if parents were not partners on task forces which sold the idea for a bond issue first to the community and then to the legislature for funding. A comprehensive health curriculum for the school district might not have been adopted if parents had not formed a task force to ensure its creation and implementation.

The former superintendent used to describe the activities of parents as being in a circle and the activities of the district as being in another; where they overlapped would be common ground. The activities of parents, whether political or otherwise, become the activities of the district; parents are the consumers. It is their children who are affected by policies and funding practices at the national, state, and local levels. The public schools belong to them. It
is therefore most proper that parents become as involved as they feel comfortable and necessary; whether that involvement be as a partner, supporter, audience, collaborator or problem solver, advisor or co-decision maker, or as an advocate, where their activities are explicitly political (Henderson, 1986). It is most essential that parents use whatever means it takes to go Beyond the Bake Sale (Henderson, 1986) and participate as active partners in their schools.

María, Beth, Eduardo, Kate, Daniel and Kay have made their mark on parent involvement and politics in the Millville Public Schools. Never again will elected officials and administrators be able to make decisions without the consequence of input from parents, whether solicited or not. Their influence has changed the landscape of politics and schools in the district in so many positive ways. Their involvement has changed the way they perceive themselves and the expectations they have for their children’s education. Their passion and voice will never be still, and their influence will affect a movement of parents for a decade to come. They have changed the district; they have energized me.
APPENDIX A

WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

Parent Involvement in a Post Proposition 2 \( \frac{1}{2} \) Era: The Effects of Politics and State Financing for Education on Parent Involvement in an Urban Setting

To participants in this study:

I am Lora Barrett, a graduate student at the University of Massachusetts, in Amherst. The subject of my doctoral research is “Parent Involvement in a Post Proposition 2 \( \frac{1}{2} \) Era: The Effects of Politics and State Financing for Education on Parent Involvement in an Urban Setting.” I am interviewing parents who either currently have children enrolled in an urban public school or whose children have graduated from an urban public school, and who have been actively involved as parents in a governance manner in an urban school district for the major portion of this past decade. You are one of six participants.

As part of the study, you are being asked to participate in an in-depth interview. You will be asked to focus on your reasons for participating in school governance, and whether or not the political climate of the past decade has influenced the types of activities you have participated in. You will be asked why the types of activities you have chosen have become your priority. You will be asked to reflect on your earlier experiences in parent involvement or your earlier impressions of what parent involvement would be, and to look ahead to what you anticipate the greatest needs will be for parent involvement in your community. I may ask an occasional question for further clarification or understanding, but my main purpose will be to listen to you as you recreate your experience within the structure of the interview. The interview will be approximately two hours in length.

My goal is to analyze the materials from your interview, in order to put in perspective what parent involvement in a post Proposition 2 \( \frac{1}{2} \) era means to you. I am interested in specific, concrete examples of what your experience has been, and the reasons for your continued involvement. As part of the dissertation, I may use sections of your interview to illustrate your reflections in your own words. I may also wish to use parts of the interview material for journal articles or presentations to interested groups, or to write a book based on the dissertation.

Each interview will be audio taped and later transcribed by either me or a typist (who will be committed to confidentiality the same as I am). In all written materials and oral presentations in which I may use materials from your interview, I will neither use your name, names of people close to you, or the community in which you live. Transcripts will be typed with initials for names, and in its final form the interview materials will use pseudonyms.

You may wish to withdraw from the interview process at any time.

In signing this form, you are also assuring me that you will make no financial claims for the use of the material in your interview.

I, ____________________________, have read the above statement and agree to participate as an interviewee under the conditions stated above.

________________________________________
signature of participant

________________________________________
signature of interviewer
date
APPENDIX B

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE ______ PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The ______ Public Schools is a dynamic urban school district, drawing on the rich cultural and historic resources of the Pioneer Valley. ______ is a city on the move, and the schools are proud to be part of an environment that is both rich in tradition and moving rapidly on a course for the twenty-first century.

The ______ Public Schools is an interconnected agency with close to 8,000 students housed in 16 school buildings. Our Early Childhood Center offers a comprehensive range of programs for the city’s youngest students. After school programs are available at many of our elementary schools. We have extensive partnerships with the arts – Pioneer Valley Folklore Society, Massachusetts Institute for the Arts, and Artist-In-Residence Programs – are familiar faces in our schools. Magnet options provide parents and students with choice on the elementary school level regardless of where they live in the community.

What perhaps distinguishes ______ from many districts is our parent involvement efforts. No other school system in the region offers as many varied opportunities for parents to have an impact on their children’s school experience.

- A city-wide organization affects district policy and decision making.
- PACs and School Improvement Councils are organized at every school.
- Handbooks, brochures, and manuals are produced for parents in 2 languages.
- The Parent Information Center offers translation, transportation, and childcare services, and maintains a full-time Parent Coordinator.

Parent Involvement in ______ wasn’t always so organized. By the spring of 1985 most people agreed that city-wide parent involvement in ______ schools was on its way out. Parents tended to rally when there was a crisis, but as ______ School Superintendent ______ recalls, “When the storm clouds blew by, the PTO no longer seemed as viable.” Or, as ____________, Director of the Parent Information Center of the ______ Public Schools says, “In the absence of issues, there were no parents.” ______ and ______, both parents fresh back from parent involvement conferences, were not ready to throw in the towel. They saw the time as ripe, and simply as a matter of taking the issue into their own hands.

What the two women initiated has reached beyond their own children’s classroom and their local parent advisory council. “Change is effected by people who demand change, and sometimes you need a person perceived as an outsider to say “Wait a minute, let’s try something different, it’s time for a change,” said ______, Director of Parent Involvement for the ______ Public Schools, of ______ and ______’s initiative.

Those changes encompass a sweeping overhaul of the parent involvement effort to create a vital, legitimate and representative parent interest group that has taken on a variety of challenges within the school district, earned the respect and support of the school committee, and led to more informed and active parents within an innovative framework that encourages parent involvement.

The foundation for these radical changes is the following Parent Involvement Policy which ______ and ______ created with the help of a fifteen member task force of parents in the summer of 1985. The city-wide organization assures parents from all ethnic and economic backgrounds a representative voice in public education in ______. “_______ and ______ were convinced that the role of parents in public school education is a vital one, a critical one, and not necessarily adversarial to what the superintendent and teachers want to accomplish,” said Superintendent ______. “What we have now is a cornerstone on which to build.”

I. PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

Building Level Structure and Policies

A primary goal is to have an active, functioning Parent Advisory Council (PAC) in every building. The structure will be as follows:

1. A PAC will be formed at each school. Every parent is a member of this Parent Advisory Council and encouraged to become an active participant.

2. The elected representatives of the PAC will be comprised of a minimum of five (5) members to include a minimum of one (1) parent from each grade level and at least one minority parent to be elected by the parent body.

On the two high School PACs there will be two (2) student representatives to be elected by the Student Council. These student representatives cannot serve on the City Wide Organization (CWO) or the Executive Committee of the PAC.

3. The Council will elect, from its voting members:

   A. An Executive Committee consisting of a President, Vice-President, Treasurer and Secretary.

   B. Two (2) representatives and an alternate to the City Wide Organization, at least one (1) of whom is from the Executive Committee of the PAC.

   C. Three (3) representatives to the School Improvement Council.

4. Their duties will be as follows:

   A. The Executive Committee of the PAC will establish the agenda, distribute the minutes of the meeting, advise members and make decisions between regular meetings (when necessary), etc.

   B. The two (2) representatives (or alternate) to the CWO will act as liaison between their PAC and the City Wide Organization, will represent their PACs viewpoint in discussions and must report back to the local school PAC at the next meeting.

   C. The three (3) representatives to the School Improvement Council (SIC) will represent the views of all PAC members at their SIC meetings and will report back to the local school PAC at the next meeting.

5. Representatives will be elected annually in September.

6. Representatives may serve a maximum of two (2) consecutive one (1) year terms in the same position in the same building.

7. All votes will be decided by a simple majority of those present.

8. Regular meetings of the PAC will be held at least every other month beginning in September (to be staggered with CWO meetings). In June, the PAC will set its meeting schedule for the upcoming year. Emergency meetings may be called
with three (3) days' notice by the Executive Committee. Notices of such meetings will be sent home with the students.

9. The PAC and or its representatives will meet a minimum of five (5) times per year with the principal to discuss educational issues which effect the building and to make recommendations concerning the school budget, the school building, class size, the purchase of new equipment, new programs, safety, policies, etc.

10. Between regular meeting of the PAC, decisions can only be made by a majority of the Executive Committee. All such decisions must be reported at the next regularly scheduled PAC meeting.

11. PAC meetings will deal with issues of general concern affecting a significant portion of parents and shall not address singular complaints best handled by an individual parent and teacher. The Executive Committee may provide guidance to a parent with an individual problem.

12. The School Committee, through the Superintendent and the Parent Concern Sub-Committee, will see that this policy is properly implemented and encouraged by the principals.

Role of the PAC

The role of the Parent Advisory Council will be as follows:

1. To act as an advisory body to the school staff in the planning, development and evaluation of the educational program.

2. To act as a liaison between parents, school staff and the CWO.

3. To plan and implement procedures to provide better communication between parents, students and the school staff.

4. To make recommendations concerning: school budget, school building, class size, purchase of new equipment, new programs, safety, policies, etc.

5. To work toward parental input into the process regarding the interviewing, assignment, and evaluation of school personnel.

6. To plan, implement and analyze in cooperation with the administration surveys of parents, students (when appropriate) and staff.

7. To recommend and evaluate the training of parents and staff concerning parent involvement.
II. CITY WIDE ORGANIZATION

Statement of Purpose:

The City Wide Organization strives to promote better communication between parents and schools. We believe that by encouraging all parents to become involved and by training them to work together effectively we can improve the educational experience in our community. Concerned, informed parents are an untapped resource. Involved parents should be partners in their children's education, using their influence to promote excellence in our schools.

The structure will be as follows:

1. Every parent is encouraged to attend meetings of the City Wide Organization (CWO). Every effort will be made to ensure that the CWO will be representative of the ethnicity of the school population of the City of _________.

2. The voting membership of the CWO will be:
   A. Two (2) representatives and (1) alternate elected from each school PAC to include at least one person from the PAC’s Executive Committee.
   B. Two (2) representatives from each of the following: 766 PAC, TBE PAC and Chapter I PAC to be elected by their members.
   C. There will be three (3) At-Large seats on the CWO. If a parent is not elected to represent a building or another PAC but wishes to serve on the CWO, he/she may become a voting member by petitioning by letter to the Parent Coordinator for one (1) of these seats. These positions will be filled by a majority vote of the membership of the CWO for a one (1) year term.

3. Representatives will be elected annually in September, with the CWO officers being elected at their October CWO meeting.

4. Representatives may serve a maximum of two (2) consecutive one (1) year terms in the same position in the same building.

5. The CWO, from its membership, will elect an Executive Committee consisting of a President, Vice President, Recording Secretary, Corresponding Secretary, Treasurer, and two at-large members.

6. There must be two-thirds (2/3) of the membership of the CWO present in order to hold elections.

7. All votes will be decided by a simple majority of those present.

8. Regular meetings of the Council will be held at least every other month beginning in October. Additional meetings may be called by a majority of the Executive Committee with three (3) days notice by mail.

9. Meetings will be held between members of the CWO and the Parent Concern Sub-committee of the School Committee, at the request of the CWO Executive
Committee, the School Department, or the School Committee to review issues. The spokesperson for the CWO will be designated by the Executive Committee.

10. All members of the school PACs may attend CWO meetings and participate in discussions, but only elected representatives or alternates may vote at CWO meetings.

11. The Parent Coordinator, or his/her representative, will attend all full CWO meetings.

12. Sub-committees of the CWO will be created as needed. Sub-committee recommendations will be reported to the Executive Committee and then the CWO for action.

13. Between regular meetings of the CWO, decisions can only be made by a majority of the Executive Committee. All such decisions must be reported at the next regularly scheduled CWO meeting.

Role of the CWO

1. To serve as the official voice of all parents.

2. To make and advocate for policy recommendations to the Superintendent and the School Committee.

3. To develop and work toward the implementation of policies and programs which relate to and encourage parent involvement.

4. To inform and involve the school PACs in the CWO's efforts regarding issues of general concern.

5. To plan and analyze surveys of parents, students, and staff, in cooperation with Central Administration.

6. To work with the Parent Information Center and Parent Coordinators to provide information to parents about school system policies and practices.

7. To recommend and evaluate staff training sessions relative to parent involvement.

8. To participate in interviews for staff.

9. To work toward parental input into the assignment and evaluation of school personnel.
III. GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

In order to insure that parents will have a voice in school issues and policies, and that their problems, concerns, and suggestions will be taken seriously and dealt with as quickly and fairly as possible, the Policy of the __________ Public Schools will be:

1. Problems with, comments or suggestions about, and proposals for curriculum, classroom materials, school administration, safety and conduct codes, and school policy in general, must first be brought to the attention of the Executive Committee of the local school PAC or special program PAC (i.e., Chapter I, 766, TBE).

2. If the issue cannot be resolved on the local PAC level within ten (10) working days, or if it is determined that part of or all of _______ schools may be affected, then it must be brought to the attention of the CWO.

3. The Executive Committee of the CWO will then form a sub-committee to research the issue. The CWO will either resolve the conflict, address the issue, and pass on its recommendation within ten (10) working days to the Superintendent, who will take appropriate action.

4. If a parent or group of parents are not satisfied with the outcome, they may approach the Parent Concerns Sub-committee through the School Committee at the next regularly scheduled meeting.

The local PACs and the CWO have been set up to give parents more input into their child’s education. Suggestions, proposals and complaints will be readily attended to by the parent groups. However, PAC meetings will deal with issues affecting a significant portion of parents and not act on singular complaints best handled by the individual parent and teacher. The Executive Committee may provide guidance to parents with individual problems.
PARENT BILL OF RIGHTS

It is the right of all parents to:
1. Be treated with courtesy by all members of school staff.

2. Expect that cultural and language differences will be respected and accommodated.

3. Visit classes after notifying the principal, who will notify the teacher.

4. Be informed of the academic requirements of any school program.

5. Be informed of school policies and administrative decisions.

6. Be informed in writing of approved procedures for seeking changes in school policies and for appealing administrative decisions.

7. Be informed in writing of all programs, including special education, Transitional Bilingual Education, pre-school education, magnet options, etc.

8. Expect that every attempt will be made by school personnel to insure the receipt by parents of important news and messages from school.

9. Participate in meaningful parent-teacher conferences to discuss his or her child’s school progress and welfare, whether those conferences be at the building site or at another site within the zone.

10. Expect reasonable protection for his/her child from physical harm while under school authority.

11. Organize and participate in organizations for parents only.

12. Be provided with assistance from school personnel to further the progress and improvement of his/her school, which includes, but is not limited to, counseling, tutorial and remedial programs, as well as information about academic and psychological services within and outside of the school district.

13. Expect a full day of education for his/her child within the legally defined number of hours and days.

14. Participate in planning and scheduling whenever shifts are necessary.

15. Have access to the services and data which administrators and principals use in planning and executing their duties.

16. Have the opportunity to furnish the Superintendent with positive input on personnel matters.

17. Be respected as an individual, regardless of race, creed, national origin, economic status, sex or age.

18. Have access to a grievance procedure with the right of judicial appeal.

Adapted from The National Committee for Citizens in Education
Parents' Expectations Of What A Parent Coordinator Will Do:

1. Work with the central and building level administration to increase parent involvement and communication.

2. Work with Outreach Workers to increase parent involvement and communication.

3. Advocate for parent concerns and involvement.

4. Attend or send a representative to all full meetings of the CWO.

5. Recruit minority members to serve on the building PACs and the CWO.

6. Provide ongoing training opportunities for parents and recommend training consultants for staff.

7. Prepare a budget that will encourage parent involvement and allow the local and city wide parent councils to operate effectively.

8. Follow through on recommendations made at all meetings between the CWO and the Parent Concern Sub-committee.

9. Be responsible for a consistent flow of information to parents.

10. Document the level of PAC involvement at the building level.

11. Assist in the planning of any social functions sponsored by the CWO.

12. Plan and develop a central resource room that will provide info to parents.

13. Implement surveys of parents, staff and students (when appropriate).

14. Contribute information to individual school newsletters.

15. Oversee the production of a bilingual quarterly city-wide newsletter for parents.

16. Coordinate the production of a bilingual system-wide handbook for parents.

17. Oversee the production of the school level handbooks and monthly newsletters in each school.

18. Refer parents who wish to volunteer in the schools to the volunteer coordinator or appropriate personnel.

19. Ensure that Outreach Workers are knowledgeable about community services so they are able to refer parents to proper social service agencies.

20. Meet and work with other parent coordinators (TBE, Chapter I, 766).

Parent Expectations Of What An Outreach Worker Will Do:

We recommend that Outreach Workers spend a significant amount of time reaching out to parents to encourage them to become more involved in the schools and with their children's formal education.

1. Act as a liaison between parents, Parent Coordinator and PACs.
2. Assist in establishing and maintaining a liaison between home and school.
3. Assist in recruiting parents to be members of PACs and the CWO.
4. Assist with visiting individual parents in their home.
5. Assist in recruiting, enlisting and encouraging the participation of parents in appropriate school activities.
6. Coordinate and provide school tours, recruit students including the kindergarten population.
7. Assist in the functions of the Parent Information Center.
8. Assist in keeping the Director of the Parent Information Center and the Desegregation staff informed of plans, problems, progress and concerns of parents and students.
9. Assist in establishing communications with community organizations, institutions and private agencies working with the schools' youth.
10. Help to administer and implement surveys of parents, staff and students.
11. Help to interpret goals, budgets and building plans to parents.
12. Help find parents to serve on task forces and committees.
13. Advocate for, facilitate, plan and coordinate parent involvement.
14. Assist in helping to arrange orientation meetings at school and in the neighborhood for parents and students new to the school.
15. Assist with gathering, publishing and distributing a monthly, building level calendar and newsletter to parents.
16. Keep parents knowledgeable of relevant issues as they arise.
17. Provide parents with emergency transportation to PAC and parent conference meetings.
18. The Outreach Worker will be encouraged to attend all PAC meetings.
It will be the policy of the _________ Public Schools that:

1. A full-time Parent Coordinator position will be maintained. The coordinator's sole responsibility should be to involve parents in the _________ Public Schools.

2. The _________ Public Schools will allocate money in its budget for parental involvement activities.

3. Both written and oral translation services will be provided for PAC and CWO meetings.

4. Transportation services to PAC and CWO meetings will be provided to parents who cannot otherwise attend.

5. Child care will be arranged on site for PAC and CWO meetings.

6. The School Committee will work with parents and staff to ensure that School Improvement Councils will reflect the concerns and opinions of parents as well as staff.

7. Copies of this policy will be placed on file in each school building and be made available to parents upon request.

8. Copies of this policy will be made available to area community organizations such as the NAACP, League of Women Voters, _______ Taxpayers Association, Chamber of Commerce, Nueva Esperanza, Girls Inc., Boys & Girl's Club, etc., as well as the City Council.

9. This policy will be reviewed by a Task Force appointed by the CWO every year. The Task Force will report its findings first to the CWO for its approval and then to the School Committee's Sub Committee on Parental Involvement for implementation by the School Committee.
SCHOOL COMMITTEE ROLE

The School Committee will seek parental input in all decisions. Informed and involved parents will advocate for public schools.

1. The School Committee encourages the use of surveys which include input from parents, students and staff.

2. The School Committee will actively encourage and foster parent involvement.

3. The School Committee will see that these parent involvement policies will be properly implemented and supported by all school department employees.

4. The School Committee encourages the School Improvement Councils to allocate funds for parent involvement training.

THE ROLE OF ADMINISTRATION

The Administration of the _______ Public Schools will seek parental input in decisions effecting the well-being of students. Informed and involved parents will strengthen the public schools.

1. The Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent will meet with representatives of the CWO on a regular, ongoing basis to discuss issues of mutual concern.

2. The Superintendent will insure that an atmosphere of cooperation with and respect for parents in issues of parent involvement is fostered at the building as well as central office levels.

3. The Superintendent will provide access, on a regular basis, for parental involvement issues to be shared with the Administrative Team.

4. The Superintendent will work with parents and administrators to see that the parent involvement policy will be properly implemented and supported by all school department employees.
APPENDIX C

PARTICIPACION DE PADRES

____ un distrito escolar dinámico, basándose en los ricos recursos, cultural e histórico, en el Valle Pioneer. Es una ciudad en progreso y las Escuelas Públicas de ____ están orgullosas de ser parte de un ambiente que es rico en tradición y se mueve rápido hacia el futuro.

Las Escuelas Públicas de ____ es una agencia compuesta cerca de 8,000 estudiantes en 16 escuelas. El Centro de Educación Primaria ofrece unos programas extensos para los estudiantes más jóvenes de la ciudad. Programas fuera de horas escolares están disponibles en casi todas nuestras escuelas elementales. Tenemos una extensa sociedad con el arte - Series de Titeres de Nueva Inglaterra, la Sociedad Tradicional del Valle Pioneer, el Instituto de Artes de Massachusetts y Programas Colaborativos de Artistas - en - Residencia - todos estos son caras conocidas en nuestras escuelas. Opciones del Programa Imán ofrece a los padres y estudiantes escoger a nivel de escuela elemental.

Algo que nos distingue a otros distritos es la participación y esfuerzo de nuestros padres. Ningún otro sistema escolar en la región ofrece tantas oportunidades a los padres de poder ser parte de la experiencia escolar de sus hijos

- Los efectos de la Junta Planificadora General en la póliza y decisiones.
- Juntas Consejeras de Padres y Juntas Escolares son organizadas en cada escuela.
- Empleados que visitan los hogares para mejor comunicación entre la escuela/hogar son asignados a cada escuela.
- El Centro de Información Para Padres ofrece traducción, transportación y cuidado de niño y tiene una Coordinadora de Padres trabajando tiempo completo.

____ no siempre estuvo tan bien organizado. Para la Primavera del 1985, la mayoría de la gente estuvo de acuerdo de que la participación de padres a través de la ciudad ya salía a relucir. Cuando existía una crisis los padres asistían a las protestas, pero como recuerda _____, Superintendente de ____, “cuando las nubes de tormenta pasaron cerca, PTO ya no parecía viable.” Como ____, Director del Centro de Información Para Padres dice “En ausencia de asuntos de importancia a discutirse, no estaban los padres.”

____ y ____ acabadas de llegar de conferencias de padres en la participación todavía no estaban listas para arrojar la toalla. Ellas vieron que el tiempo ya estaba maduro, que era asunto de tomar riendas de los asuntos.

Lo que iniciaron estas dos mujeres ha ido mucho más allá del salón de clases y de la junta local de padres. “Cambios son efectuados por aquellos que demandan cambios, y a veces uno necesita a uno de afuera que diga “un momento, tratemos de otra manera, es tiempo de cambiar,” dice ____, Coordinadora de Padres de las Escuelas Públicas de ____. acerca de la iniciativa de ____ y ____.

Estos cambios acompañados con motivación y esfuerzo de los padres que vieron la necesidad de escoger un grupo a nivel de distrito, se ganó el respeto y apoyo del Comité Escolar y condujo a una mayor participación de padres activos.

La base de estos cambios radicales es la siguiente Póliza Padres Participantes en la cual ____ y ____ junto a 15 miembros de la Junta de Trabajo de Padres crearon en el verano del 1985. La Junta CWPPC asegura a padres de todas las razas y estado socio-económico garantía de ser representado en la educación pública de ____.

“____ y ____ están convencidas de que la participación de padres en la educación escolar es vital y es crítica y no adversa a lo que el superintendente y maestros desean lograr” dice el Superintendente ____. “Lo que ahora tenemos es una piedra angular donde construir.”

I. CONSEJO ASESOR DE PADRES

Normas y estructura de cada escuela

El Consejo Asesor de Padres tiene como meta tener un consejo asesor (PAC) en cada edificio. La estructura será de la siguiente manera:

1. Se formará un Consejo (PAC) en cada escuela. Todos los padres son miembros de este Consejo Asesor de Padres y deben participar activamente.

2. El Consejo (PAC) consistirá de un mínimo de cinco (5) miembros para incluir un mínimo de un padre de cada grado y por lo menos uno (1) minoritario elegido por el cuerpo parental.

El Consejo Asesor (PAC) de la Escuela Vocacional Dean y la Escuela Superior tendrá dos estudiantes representantes elegidos por el concilio de estudiantes. Estos estudiantes representantes no pueden servir en el Consejo General de Padres de la Ciudad (CWO) o en el Comité Ejecutivo del Consejo Asesor de Padres (PAC).

3. El Consejo elegirá de entre sus miembros:

   A. Oficiales consisten tes de presidente, vice-presidente, tesorero y secretaria/o;

   B. Dos (2) representantes y un substituto para el Consejo General de Padres de la Ciudad, por lo menos uno (1) deber ser oficial del Consejo Asesor de Padres local (PAC);

   C. Tres (3) representantes al consejo de Mejora Escolar (SIC);

   D. Mínimo de un (1) representante por nivel de grado;

   E. mínimo de un (1) representante minoritario.

El consejo debe esforzarse para que el PAC sea reflexivo en las diferencias raciales y género de población de las escuelas, requiriendo que allá por lo menos un (1) representante minoritario en el comité ejecutivo lo cual debe ser una meta para todo consejo.

4. Sus deberes serán los siguientes:

   A. El Comité Ejecutivo de Consejo Asesor de padres (PAC) establecerá un programa, distribuirá las minutas de la reunión, dará sugerencias a los miembros y tomará decisiones en las reuniones (cuando sea necesario), etc.

   B. Los dos (2) representantes (o substitutos) a 1 Consejo General (CWO) servirán de intermediarios entre éste y su Consejo Asesor (PAC), representarán el punto de vista de su consejo y deberán dar un informe en la próxima reunión de ésta.

   C. Los dos representantes al Comité de Mejora Escolar (SIC) representarán a todos los miembros del Consejo Asesor local (PAC) en las reuniones del
Comité y presentarán un informe en la próxima reunión del Consejo Asesor de su escuela.

5. Los representantes serán elegidos anualmente en septiembre.

6. Los representantes pueden servir un máximo de dos años consecutivos (términos de un año cada uno).

7. Todos los votos serán decididos por la mayoría de los que estén presentes.

8. Las reuniones regulares del Consejo Asesor (PAC) serán por lo menos cada dos meses empezando en septiembre (alternándose con las reuniones del Consejo General (CWO).) En mayo el Consejo Asesor local (PAC) preparará el programa del año. El Comité ejecutivo puede convocar a una reunión de emergencia dando tres días de aviso. Los anuncios serán enviados con el estudiante.

9. El Consejo Asesor o sus representantes se reunirá por lo menos cinco veces al año con el principal para considerar asuntos que afecten la educación y el bienestar del estudiante.


11. En las reuniones del Consejo sólo serán considerados asuntos que afecten a una porción significante de padres y no quejas individuales que pueden ser atendidas mejor por el padre y el maestro. El Comité Ejecutivo puede servir de guía a padres con problemas individuales.

12. El Comité Escolar de a través del Superintendente y el Sub-Comité de asuntos de Padres se encargará que estas normas sean implementadas de una manera apropiada por los principales.

**Deberes del Consejo Asesor de Padres (PAC)**

Los deberes del Consejo son como sigue:

1. Servir de cuerpo consejero a la administración escolar en el planeamiento, desarrollo y evaluación del programa educativo.

2. Servir de intermediario entre los padres, la escuela y el Consejo General (CWO).

3. Planear e implementar procedimientos para proveer mejor comunicación entre los padres, el estudiante y la escuela.

4. Hacer recomendaciones respecto al presupuesto escolar, edificio escolar, tamaño de clases, compra de equipo nuevo, nuevos programas, seguridad, normas, etc.

5. Trabajar hacia tener influencia parental en el proceso de asignaciones y evaluaciones del personal escolar.
6. Planear, implementar y analizar en cooperación con la administración: estudios de padres, estudiantes (cuando sea apropiado) y personal.

7. Recomendar y evaluar entrenamiento de los padres y personal respecto a la participación de padres.
Propósito:

El Consejo General de Padres aspira a promover la comunicación efectiva entre la escuela y los padres. Creemos que impulsando el envolvimiento de los padres y preparándolos para trabajar juntos podemos mejorar la educación en nuestra comunidad. Los padres con preocupación y conocimiento son un recurso sin explotar. Los padres deben participar en la educación de sus hijos y usar su influencia para fomentar la excelencia en nuestras escuelas.

La estructura será como sigue:

1. Se anima a todos los padres a asistir a las reuniones del Consejo General (CWO). Se llevarán a cabo todos los esfuerzos para asegurar que la composición del Consejo General de Padres (CWO) refleje la población escolar de la ciudad.

2. Los miembros votantes del Consejo General de Padres (CWO) serán:

   A. Dos (2) representantes y un substituto elegido por el Consejo Asesor de Padres (PAC) en las respectivas escuelas, incluyendo por lo menos uno de los oficiales del PAC.

   B. Dos (2) representantes de cada una de los siguientes consejos: Consejo Asesor de Padres (PAC) 766, el Consejo Asesor de Padres (PAC) del programa Bilingüe y el Consejo Asesor de Padres del Capítulo I, que serán elegidos por sus respectivos miembros.

   C. Habrá tres (3) asientos generales en el Consejo. Si un padre no es elegido para representar su edificio respectivo el Consejo Asesor de Padres (PAC) pero desea servir en el consejo, él/la puede ser miembro votante haciendo una peticion por escrito a la Directora de Involvimiento de Padres para uno de los asientos disponibles.

Si los miembros de CWO no reflejan la composición racial del sistema escolar en un 10% (porcentaje aceptado por el Estado en el plan de desegregación) el CWO podría dejar de limitar a tres el número de miembros para alcanzar su meta de máxima representación minoritaria en el CWO.

Las personas para cubrir estas posiciones serán seleccionados por el voto de la mayoría de los miembros del Consejo y por el término de un año.

3. Los representantes serán elegidos anualmente en septiembre y los oficiales serán elegidos en la reunión del CWO del mes de octubre.

4. Los representantes pueden servir un máximo de dos años consecutivos (dos términos de un año cada uno) en el mismo puesto y en la misma escuela.

5. El Consejo elegirá de entre sus miembros un Comité Ejecutivo que consistirá de presidente, vice presidente, tesorero, secretario/a, secretario/a de correspondencia y dos miembros generales.
El ex-presidente inmediato del CWPPC se convertirá en miembro del CWO y del Comité Ejecutivo con derecho al voto.

6. Para poder llevar acabo elecciones, necesitan estar presentes 2/3 partes de los miembros del Consejo.

7. Todos los votos serán decididos por una simple mayoría de los que estén presentes cuando no sea inconsistente con el orden de las reglas Robert.

8. El Consejo se reunirá por lo menos cada dos meses comenzando en Octubre. Pueden llevarse acabo reuniones adicionales si haci lo requiere la mayoría del Comité Ejecutivo notificándose por correo tres días por anticipado.

9. Habrá reuniones entre miembros del Consejo General (CWO) y el Sub-Comité de Asuntos de Padres del Comité Escolar cuando lo requieran el Comité Ejecutivo del Consejo General, el Departamento de Escuelas o el Comité Escolar. La persona designada como vocero en la reunión sera seleccionada por el Comité Ejecutivo.

10. Todos los miembros de los diferentes Consejos Asesores de Padres de las escuelas pueden asistir a las reuniones del Consejo General y participar en las discusiones, pero solo pueden votar los representantes elegidos o sus substitutos.

11. La Directora de Envolvimiento de Padres o su representante asistirá a todas las reuniones del Consejo General de Padres (CWO).


14. El quorum consistirá de aquellos presentes y representantes debidamente electos o sus sustitutos, siempre que tenga notificación adecuada y copia de la agenda.

**Funciones del Consejo General de Padres (CWO)**

1. Servir de vocero oficial de todos los padres.

2. Hacer y abogar por recomendaciones de normas al Superintendente y el Comité Escolar.

3. Desarrollar e implementar normas y programas que estimulen la participación de padres.

4. Informar y envolver los Consejos Asesores locales (PAC) en los esfuerzos del Consejo General de Padres (CWO) en asuntos de interés.

5. Planificar y analizar estudios de padres, estudiantes y personal en cooperación con la Oficina Central.
6. Trabajar con el Centro Informativo de Padres y los Coordinadores de Padres para proveer información a los padres acerca de las normas y costumbres escolares.

7. Recomendar y evaluar sesiones de entrenamiento para padres y personal escolar.

8. Participar en las entrevistas de trabajo del personal.

9. Trabajar hacia el envolvimiento de padres en las asignaciones y evaluaciones del personal escolar.
III. PROCEDIMIENTO DE QUERELLAS

Para asegurar que los padres puedan participar en los asuntos escolares y normas, para que sus problemas, asuntos y sugerencias sean atendidas a tiempo y eficazmente, el procedimiento de querellas de las Escuelas Públicas será como sigue:

1. Problemas con comentarios o sugerencias y propuestas sobre currículo, materiales para clases, administración escolar, reglas de seguridad y conducta, y reglas de la escuela en general, deberán ser presentados primero al Comité Ejecutivo del Consejo Asesor de Padres (PAC) de la escuela o programa especial (i.e., Capítulo I, 766, Bilingüe).

2. Si el asunto no lo puede resolver el Consejo Asesor de padres (PAC) en 10 días laborables, o si se determina que parte de o todas las Escuelas Públicas pueden ser afectadas entonces se debe presentar el Consejo General de Padres (CWO).


4. Si un padre o grupo de padres no está satisfecho con los resultados, puede traer el asunto al Sub-comité de Asuntos de Padres a través del Comité Escolar en su próxima reunión.

Los Consejos Asesores de Padres locales (PAC) y el Consejo General de Padres (CWO) han sido formadas con el propósito de envolver a los padres en la educación de sus hijos. Las sugerencias, propuestas y quejas serán atendidas debidamente por los grupos de padres. Los asuntos que afecten a un grupo significante de padres son los que deben ser atendidos y no las quejas simples que pueden resueltas mejor por el padre y el maestro. El Comité Ejecutivo puede servir de guía a padres con problemas individuales.
LA CONSTITUCION DE DERECHOS DE PADRES

Cada padre tiene el derecho a:

1. Ser tratado con cortesía por todo el personal escolar.
2. Esperar que su idioma y cultura sean tratados con respeto.
3. Visitar la escuela y las clases después de haber notificado al principal.
4. Ser informado de los requisitos académicos de cualquier programa escolar.
5. Ser informado de las normas escolares y decisiones administrativas.
6. Ser informado por escrito de los procedimientos aprobados para hacer cambios en las normas escolares y para apelar las decisiones administrativas.
7. Ser informado de todos los programas, incluyendo educación especial, Educación Transicional Bilingüe, educación preescolar y programas iman.
8. Esperar que la escuela haga todo el esfuerzo posible para hacer llegar a los padres cualquier información o mensaje importante.
9. Participar en conferencias con maestros para discutir el progreso y bienestar del estudiante.
10. Que su hijo/a sea protegido de daños físicos mientras esté bajo la autoridad escolar.
11. Organizar y participar en organizaciones para padres solamente.
12. Recibir ayuda del personal escolar para desarrollar el progreso y mejora del estudiante en la escuela, lo cual incluye pero no está limitado a consejería, tutoría y programas reparadores, y también información acerca de los servicios académicos y sicológicos, tanto adentro como afuera del Distrito Escolar.
13. Un día completo de educación para el estudiante según lo especifica la ley en horas y días.
15. Ser informado de los servicios e información que permiten a los administradores y principales ejercer sus funciones, poderes y deberes de manera apropiada.
16. Reunirse con el Superintendente para poder discutir de forma positiva asuntos del personal.
17. Ser respetado como individuo, sin importar raza, color, credo, nacionalidad, situación económica, sexo, o edad.
18. Un procedimiento de quejas con derecho a apelación judicial.

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Lo que esperan los padres de el / la Director/a de Envolvimiento de Padres:

1. Trabajar con la administración central y local para aumentar la participación y la comunicación con los padres.

2. Trabajar con los empleados que visitan los hogares (Outreach) para aumentar la participación y comunicación con los padres.

3. Abogar por los padres y su participación.

4. Asistir o enviar representantes a todas las reuniones del Consejo General de Padres (CWO).

5. Reclutar miembros de la minoría para que sirvan en el Consejo Asesor de Padres (PAC) y el Consejo General de Padres (CWO).

6. Proveer oportunidades de entrenamiento para los padres y recomendar especialistas en entrenamiento para el personal.

7. Preparar un presupuesto que anime a los padres a envolverse y que permita a los consejos tanto locales como general, trabajar efectivamente.

8. Darle seguimiento a las recomendaciones de las reuniones entre el Consejo general de Padres (CWO) y Sub-Comité de asuntos de Padres.

9. Ser responsable de que los padres reciban información periodicamente.

10. Documentar la participación de los Consejos Asesores de Padres (PAC) en cada escuela.

11. Ayudar en el planeamiento de funciones auspiciadas por el Consejo General de Padres (CWO).

12. Desarrollar y planear un salón de recursos donde los padres puedan buscar información.

13. Implementar estudios de padres, personal y estudiantes cuando sea apropiado.

14. Contribuir información a los periódicos escolares.

15. Supervisar la publicación de un periódico bilingüe trimestral.

16. Coordinar la producción de folletos bilingües para los padres.

17. Supervisar la producción de folletos escolares y folletos mensuales de cada escuela.

18. Referirpadres, interesados en dar servicio voluntario a las escuelas, a personas apropiadas o al coordinador de padres.

19. Asegurarse que los empleados visitantes (Outreach) estén al tanto de los servicios disponibles en la comunidad para poder referir a los padres a las agendas sociales pertinentes.
20. Reunirse con otros coordinadores de padres (TBE, Capítulo I, 766).

21. Servir de coordinador para el Consejo General de Padres (CWO) y Consejo Asesor de Padres (PAC) en las elecciones.

Lo que esperan los padres del empleado visitante:

Recomendamos que los empleados visitantes pasen bastante tiempo hablando con padres y animándolos a envolverse en las escuelas y en la educación de sus hijos.

1. Servir de intermediarios entre los padres, Directora de Envolvimiento de Padres y los (PAC).

2. Servir de intermediario entre la escuela y el hogar.

3. Ayudar a reclutar padres para los Consejos Asesores de Padres (PAC) y el Consejo General de Padres (CWO).

4. Visitar a los padres en sus hogares.

5. Ayudar a reclutar y animar a los padres a participar en actividades escolares.

6. Coordinar y dar giras de la escuela a los padres, reclutar estudiantes incluyendo los de jardín infantil.

7. Ayudar al Centro Informativo de Padres.

8. Ayudar a mantener al director del Centro Informativo de Padres y el personal de Desegregación bien informados de los problemas, progreso y asuntos de padres y estudiantes.

9. Ayudar a establecer comunicación con organizaciones en la comunidad, instituciones y agencias privadas que trabajan con la juventud estudiantil.

10. Ayudar a administrar e implementar estudios de padres, personal y estudiantes.

11. Ayudar a los padres a interpretar las metas, presupuesto y planes de la escuela.

12. Ayudar a buscar padres interesados en participar en grupos de trabajo y comités.

13. Facilitar, planear, y abogar, coordinar y abogar la participación de padres.

14. Ayudar a coordinar reuniones de orientación para estudiantes nuevos y padres en la escuela y el vecindario.

15. Ayudar a recopilar, publicar y distribuir mensualmente calendarios y periódicos escolares a los padres.

16. Mantener a los padres al día de los asuntos que puedan surgir.

17. Proveer transportación de emergencia a las reuniones de los Consejos Asesores y a las conferencias de padres.
18. Asistir a las reuniones de los Consejos Asesores.
Será la política de Las Escuelas Públicas que:

1. Se tenga una plaza de Director/a de Envolvimiento de Padres a tiempo completo. Que la responsabilidad de este se el envolvimiento de padres en las Escuelas Públicas.

2. Las Escuelas Públicas asignarán una cantidad en su presupuesto para actividades de padres.

3. Haya servicios de traducción tanto oral como escrita en las reuniones de los Consejos Asesores de Padres (PAC) y del Consejo General de Padres (CWO).

4. Se provea transporte para las reuniones de los Consejos Asesores de Padres (PAC) y el Consejo General de Padres (CWO) para quien lo necesite.

5. Se provea cuidado de niños en las reuniones de los consejos.

6. El Comité Escolar trabaje con padres y personal para asegurar que los Consejos de Mejoras Escolares reflejen las opiniones de los padres y el personal.

7. Agrupación y/o comité establecido por el Comité Escolar o la administración que incluirá representación de los padres el cual será elegido por el CWO.

8. Agrupación y/o comité establecido por el Comité Escolar o la administración que incluirá padres que se reunirán periodicamente y aceptado mutuamente por ambas partes.

9. Comités para entrevistar al personal incluirá a padres como participantes asociados completos.

10. Haya copias de estas reglas en el archivo de cada escuela y estén disponibles a los padres que las deseen.

11. Copias de estas reglas estén disponibles a organizaciones de la comunidad como la NAACP, la Liga de Mujeres Votantes, Asociación de Contribuyentes, Cámara de Comercio, Nueva Esperanza, Club de Muchachas, Club de Muchachos y también a la Junta de Concejales.

12. Estas normas sean revisadas por un grupo de trabajo nombrado por el Consejo General de Padres (CWO) cada año. El grupo de trabajo reportará los resultados primero al Consejo General y luego al Sub-Comité de Participación de Padres del Comité Escolar.
DEBERES DEL COMITE ESCOLAR

El Comité Escolar buscará respaldo de los padres en todas las decisiones. Los padres informados y participantes abogarán por las escuelas públicas.

1. El Comité Escolar estimulará el uso de estudios que incluyan la participación de padres, estudiantes y personal.

2. El Comité Escolar activamente estimulará y apoyará la participación de padres.

3. El Comité Escolar ha de asegurarse de que las normas de participación de padres sean implementadas y mantenidas por todos los empleados escolares.

4. El Comité Escolar animará a la Junta de Mejora Escolar a distribuir fondos para entrenamiento en envolvimiento de padres.

DEBERES DE LA ADMINISTRACION

La administración de las Escuelas Públicas solicitarán la participación de los padres en las decisiones que afecten el bienestar de los estudiantes. La participación de padres informados hará fuerte las escuelas públicas.

1. El Superintendente y el superintendente auxiliar se reunirán periódicamente con los representantes de la Junta General para discutir asuntos que les conciernan.

2. El Superintendente se asegurará que las escuelas y la oficina central promuevan un ambiente de cooperación y respeto para los padres.

3. El Superintendente proveerá acceso, regularmente, para que los asuntos de padres se compartan con el equipo administrativo.

4. El Superintendente trabajará con padres y administradores para que el código de padres sea implementado por todos los empleados del departamento escolar.


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